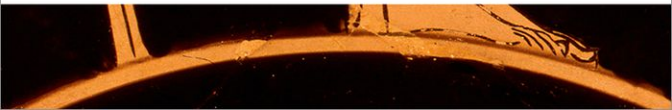




Plato  
Theaetetus

Translation by John McDowell

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## THEAETETUS

PLATO (c.427–347 BCE), Athenian philosopher–dramatist, has had a profound and lasting influence upon Western intellectual tradition. Born into a wealthy and prominent family, he grew up during the conflict between Athens and the Peloponnesian states which engulfed the Greek world from 431 to 404 BCE. Following its turbulent aftermath, he was deeply affected by the trial, condemnation, and execution of his revered teacher Socrates (469–399) on charges of irreligion and corrupting the young. Spurning political activity, Plato devoted his life to the pursuit of philosophy and the writing of philosophical inquiries cast in dialogue form. These include *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and many others. Most of the dialogues have Socrates as their main character, and they are a testament to the inspiration and unique example Socrates provided. As well as writing until his old age, Plato founded his Academy in Athens, an ancestor of the modern university, devoted to philosophical and mathematical inquiry. The Academy's most celebrated member was the young Aristotle (384–322), who studied there for the last twenty years of Plato's life.

Plato is the earliest Western philosopher from whose output complete works have been preserved. At least twenty-five of his dialogues are extant, ranging from fewer than twenty to more than three hundred pages in length. For their combination of dramatic realism, poetic beauty, inventive argument, and intellectual vitality they are unique in Western literature.

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PLATO

*Theaetetus*



*Translated by*  
JOHN McDOWELL

*With an Introduction and Notes by*  
LESLEY BROWN

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP  
United Kingdom

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Translation © Oxford University Press 1973, 2014

Editorial material © Lesley Brown 2014

This edition first published as an Oxford World's Classics paperback 2014

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013943036

ISBN 978-0-19-964616-6

Printed in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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## INTRODUCTION

PLATO (427–347 BCE) is the first Western philosopher of whom we have a large body of written work surviving, and is acknowledged to be one of the greatest. Most of his dialogues, as well as the *Apology*, or *Defence Speech*, feature his teacher Socrates, who was put to death in 399 BCE after a trial in Athens in which he was found guilty on charges of impiety: corrupting the young and not recognizing the city's gods. After that shocking event many writers crafted works about Socrates, but only those by Plato and Xenophon survive, with rather different portrayals of Socrates and his intellectual adventures. Even within Plato's own œuvre we find different approaches to philosophy, and with them varying portraits of Socrates. Though the man himself, Socrates, wrote nothing, he exerted a tremendous influence, especially on Plato, but it is a matter of dispute which of the philosophical views and methods of argument we find in Plato were held by the historical Socrates.

In many short works believed to be written early in his career, and known as Socratic or elenctic dialogues ('elenctic' means questioning or refuting), Plato presents a Socrates who denies he has knowledge himself but probes the views of his opponents while they try to answer his abstract questions such as 'What is courage?' (*Laches*) or 'What is temperance?' (*Charmides*). Many of these presumed early works end in *aporia*, an impasse in which all the answers offered are disproved and the only progress is that the opponent learns that he is not after all the expert on the matter discussed that he thought he was.

A rather different Socrates takes centre stage in a group of longer works, including the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. In these we find Socrates still conducting an inquiry with others, but playing a far more positive role. We find him arguing fluently for firm views, no longer just on ethical matters as before, but on the immortality of the soul (*Phaedo*) and the nature of reality and the philosopher's



knowledge of it (*Phaedo* and *Republic*). In these we find Socrates putting forward what has become known as the Theory of Forms. He distinguishes what is perceptible—everyday things—from the so-called Forms—the just itself, the beautiful itself, the equal itself; as opposed to things that are equal to other things, such as sticks or stones. These Forms are said to be imperceptible, unchanging, and knowable by intellect alone. To know a Form *F* is to know what *F* itself (the just itself or the equal itself) really is. Plato makes Socrates proclaim in the *Phaedo* some famous dualisms, distinguishing body from soul; sensible from intelligible; changing from unchanging: dualisms that have made a mark on Western philosophy under the label Platonism, and that critics believe must have been far removed from any views the historical Socrates held (even if they stemmed from aspects of Socrates' teaching).

### *The Enigmas of the Theaetetus*

The *Theaetetus* is acknowledged as a classic treatment of its subject: what is knowledge? Many themes central to subsequent philosophy of knowledge play a starring role in the dialogue: the relation of perception to knowledge, relativism (in the guise of Protagoras' famous claim that man is the measure of all things), and the idea that knowledge is true belief plus some further condition: a precursor of the tripartite definition of knowledge as justified true belief. The work is wide-ranging and packed with arguments of astonishing depth and subtlety. But it presents the reader with many enigmas. We can be sure that it stems from Plato's mature period (in part from stylometric tests: tests that scrutinize often unconscious features of written style); it was probably written shortly after the *Republic*, to which it contains many allusions. But, instead of the *Republic's* confident Socrates arguing for weighty theories of knowledge and reality, we find instead a self-confessed wisdom-lacking Socrates pursuing the question 'What is knowledge?' in a manner reminiscent of the elenctic dialogues. Taking the young Theaetetus as inquiry partner, he elicits from him several answers, rejects them all after lengthy discussion, and ends

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with the declaration that they haven't discovered what knowledge is: only what it isn't. In all the dialogues that reach an impasse readers are left wondering if Socrates is keeping something up his sleeve: in other words, if Plato intends the reader to discern some positive truths about the matter under discussion by noting some hints among the apparently negative argumentation. The temptation to do so here is all the more pressing given that the work belongs to Plato's mature philosophy and follows the *Republic*, where Socrates had confidently argued for an account of knowledge that highlighted the non-sensible but intelligible Forms as the objects of knowledge. Yet in the *Theaetetus* the Forms are barely if ever mentioned, and much of the dialogue's focus is on knowledge of the sensible, empirical world. The Socrates of *Theaetetus* does not seem to be someone with weighty metaphysical views, and certainly not the *Republic's* view, which associates knowledge strongly with the Platonic Forms.

Another enigma concerns the final unsuccessful definition of knowledge. After refuting the first two suggestions, (1) that knowledge is perception and (2) that knowledge is true judgement (that is, true belief), they turn to a third suggestion, (3) that knowledge is true judgement *with an account* (*logos*). Now, in an earlier work, the *Meno*, Plato had made Socrates argue for a similar definition, according to which *knowledge is true judgement tied down by a working out of the explanation*. In both *Theaetetus* and *Meno*, the speakers agree that knowledge cannot be equated simply with true belief, since your belief (say, about the way to Larissa or about what happened at a robbery) can be true by chance or good luck, in which case you don't have knowledge. But here in *Theaetetus*, instead of endorsing a definition of knowledge along the lines of *Meno* 98, Socrates considers three ways in which adding an account, or *logos*, could turn true belief into knowledge, and rejects them all, without revisiting the definition proposed in the *Meno*.

A further puzzle about our dialogue is likely to strike those who have studied the topic of knowledge in modern philosophy. Recent discussions often start by dividing up different kinds of knowing, perhaps into knowing that *something is true* (propositional

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knowledge), knowing *how to do something*, and knowing *things, persons, or places*. Plato, on the other hand, allows his speakers to move freely between all these kinds of knowing: they talk of knowing things such as a wagon or Theaetetus, and of knowing that something is the case (that so-and-so was the robber or that seven and five make twelve), while cobblery (knowing how to make shoes) is one of the first examples of knowledge given. Sometimes Socrates speaks of knowing a thing (a wagon or knowledge) when this equates to knowing what the thing is. Such an interest in knowledge of essences, of what something really is, is evident in all Plato's works, but other types of knowing are also prominent in the *Theaetetus* discussion.

This Introduction will review some responses to these enigmas in ancient and modern writers, once the main plot of the work has been set out.

### THE FRAME (142A–143C): INTRODUCING THE DIALOGUE ITSELF

In the dialogue 'frame', or introduction, two friends of the now deceased Socrates meet and exchange the news that Theaetetus has been gravely injured in battle. They recall a discussion in which the teenage Theaetetus had greatly impressed Socrates with his talents, and Euclides reveals that he has made a written record of the conversation, thanks to Socrates' help, and has got the document with him. So a servant duly starts to read it out, and we immediately meet the three main characters: the elderly Socrates, a visiting professor of mathematics named Theodorus, and one of his pupils, Theaetetus, to whom Socrates soon puts the question: What is knowledge?

### PART I (146D–187A): KNOWLEDGE IS PERCEPTION; PROTAGORAS AND RELATIVISM; HERACLEITEAN FLUX

After an initial false move, giving a list of kinds of knowledge instead of a unitary definition, the young Theaetetus proffers his first definition: knowledge is perception. We might expect a rapid refutation producing some counter-examples: plenty of knowledge

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has nothing to do with perception. But no: Socrates plays along with the definition, and introduces two famous theories, the Relativism of Protagoras, in which he claimed that man is the measure of all things, and a theory that everything is in motion or flux, on the pretext that Theaetetus' claim says the same as each of these. In a long stretch of astonishing versatility, the three theories are first linked together, then disentangled. The Man–Measure thesis and the Flux theory are singly refuted before Socrates finally dispatches the equation of knowledge with perception.

Protagoras' Man–Measure theory claims that how something appears to a person, so it is for that person; thus, the same wind may be cold for me and hot for you, with both of us being free from error. Since knowledge is free from error, what appears—that is, perception—is knowledge. To flesh this out Socrates elaborates a theory of perception featuring various so-called 'movements': twin parents (such as a person's eye, and a stick or stone to be seen) engendering twin offspring—whiteness in the stone and seeing white in the eye. The point of this is to make perception incorrigible: what I perceive when I feel the wind or see a stone is a quality private to me thanks to my unique encounter with (say) the stone, so you can't tell me I'm wrong when it appears white to me or when the wind appears cold to me. They *are* that way to me if that's how they appear.

From those fairly plausible beginnings Socrates spins out an incredible theory according to which an object can never look or taste the same to two people, or to me at different moments. Indeed, on some readings the perception theory does away altogether with persisting objects and perceivers. As such it has been likened to Berkeley's idealism, reducing perceived objects to mere collections of ideas, and to Hume's dissolution of the self into bundles of perceptions.

Protagoras' Relativism began as the claim that whatever appears to a person is so for that person, but Socrates extends it beyond perceptual appearances and develops it into full-blown relativism: all beliefs are true for the person who believes them. (However, we should be suspicious of the notion that something can be

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true *for somebody*.) The two arguments Socrates mounts against this full-blown relativism have become classics. The first, later known as the table-turning argument, tries to show that Protagoras himself must admit that his view is false, since others believe it to be false and his theory says that whatever someone believes is true for that person. (Problems with this argument are discussed in the Explanatory Notes on 170–1.) Socrates next argues that if there are experts (and Protagoras claims to be one) then not everyone's beliefs on all matters are true, so Protagoras can't both maintain his Man–Measure theory and claim to be an expert.

Before delivering these fatal blows to relativism, Socrates mounts a defence of the long-dead Protagoras, offering him a more plausible, if restricted, version of relativism: whatever a city-state holds to be just or admirable or required by religion is so for that state as long as it holds it to be so. Here we have an early appearance of a version of moral relativism, according to which the truth of a moral judgement such as 'bigamy is wrong' depends on the proclamations or conventions of a given state or society. Instead of arguing against it, Socrates remarks that it can't apply to what is beneficial or advantageous: even if every state's decrees are *equally just*, some are *more advantageous* (to the state and its citizens) than others, and the expert statesman is the one who recognizes which these are, and encourages a state to adopt them.<sup>1</sup> Now comes a famous digression on the difference between rhetoric and true philosophy. In it Socrates makes clear that he has no truck with views that deny justice an objective status, but, for the refutation of Protagoras, it is enough to demonstrate that in judgements of advantage, or of the future generally, we all believe and trust in experts, who get things right. So not everyone's beliefs on all matters are true.

After dispatching relativism, Socrates turns to refute the Flux theory, or at least an extreme version which, he claims, would

<sup>1</sup> E. Hussey, 'Rescuing Protagoras', in S. Lovibond and S. G. Williams (eds.), *Essays for David Wiggins* (Oxford, 1996), defends an interpretation of Protagoras' theory on which it is an early version of pragmatism.

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make it impossible to describe things correctly. Then he returns to Theaetetus' original claim that knowledge is perception. To refute it he argues that perception is mere experiencing: something babies and animals can do via their sense-organs. But there are common notions such as being, sameness, and difference, which the mind applies to things without help from the senses, and it is in judgements concerning these—comparisons and calculations—that knowledge lies, not at all in mere perceiving.

### PART 2 (187B–201C): KNOWLEDGE IS TRUE JUDGEMENT, AND THE PARADOXES OF FALSE JUDGEMENT

Knowledge lies not in perception but in the area of judging: that was the upshot of Part 1. But, unlike judgements or beliefs, knowledge can't be false, so perhaps knowledge is simply true judgement (that is, true belief)? This proposal will be quickly defeated by the example of a lucky true judgement which can't qualify as knowledge: a jury member's correct judgement about what happened at a robbery. But before that Socrates introduces a set of puzzles designed to cause difficulties for the very possibility of false judgement. The inquirers are not actually in any doubt that false judgements are possible—after all Protagoras' denial of this has been soundly defeated. No, these are clever paradoxes probing how a person can know enough to have a belief about something yet still be wrong about it and mistake it for something else. To try to solve the intriguing puzzles, Socrates invokes two striking images for the mind to try to account for false belief. In one, he likens the mind to a wax tablet that bears memory imprints of things we have previously seen, heard, and so on. False belief then becomes a mismatching of a present perception with a memory imprint. But that image cannot cater for all misidentifications, so another one is introduced: the mind as an aviary in which bits of knowledge we have acquired (like birds we have captured) are placed in the aviary to fly around ready for us to get hold of one of them when we want to actualize a piece of knowledge we have. However, the puzzles remain unsolved, provoking readers themselves to look for the sources of the problem.

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### PART 3 (201C–210D): KNOWLEDGE IS TRUE JUDGEMENT WITH AN ACCOUNT; SOCRATES' DREAM

What is it that, added to true belief, yields knowledge? This has been labelled 'the problem of the Theaetetus'<sup>2</sup>—a hot topic in much recent epistemology—and it is the subject of the last part of the dialogue. Part 3 features three unsuccessful attempts to solve it by finding a kind of *logos*, or account, which, added to a true judgement of a thing, yields knowledge of that thing. But first Socrates states then criticizes a thesis known as Socrates' Dream. This theory divides complexes (that is, compounds) from the primary elements that make them up, and argues that while complexes are knowable and 'have an account'—that is, a sort of definition—in terms of their constituent elements, the elements themselves are unknowable and have no account: they cannot be further analysed. According to this odd theory, knowledge (of a complex) is grounded in its *unknowable* elements—a point vehemently disputed by Socrates in a series of challenging arguments. While a comparison with early twentieth-century Logical Atomism is attractive,<sup>3</sup> the correct interpretation of the Dream theory is a matter of controversy.

Finally they turn to the question: What kind of *logos* must be added to a true judgement to make knowledge? Not (i) the kind of *logos*, or account, that is merely a spoken statement. Perhaps some kind of definition: either (ii) the enumeration of a thing's elements or (iii) the mark that distinguishes the thing in question. (Note that both these suggestions suppose that the topic here is knowledge of a thing, or of what the thing is.) Suggestion (ii) is rejected with another counter-example: someone could have a true judgement of the first syllable of a word, and enumerate its elements correctly, but if they get the same syllable wrong in another word, their grasp falls short of knowledge. Here Plato makes an important point about how knowledge in such a case requires expertise and

<sup>2</sup> See R. M. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1953), §46, quotes from the Dream theory, then adds, 'Both Russell's "individuals" and my "objects" (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) were such primary elements.' In 1939 Ryle, too, drew a comparison between the Dream theory and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, in G. Ryle, 'Plato's *Parmenides*' (1939), repr. in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London, 1965).

reliability. The last proposal, (iii), is undermined through an argument by dilemma: must the would-be knower (*a*) merely have a *judgement* of the distinguishing mark?—but that's not enough for knowledge, since, Socrates argues, you can't have a judgement about X in the first place without a judgement of what distinguishes X from other things. So something more is required. Or (*b*) must the would-be knower of X *know* X's distinguishing mark?—but then the definition is circular. Plato may have held that such a dilemma is fatal to any attempt to define knowledge as true judgement plus some further condition. At any rate, the search for what knowledge is ends at this point, and all that remains is for Socrates to remark that young Theaetetus is in a better state now he no longer thinks he knows things he doesn't in fact know. With that Socrates departs, saying he must face the charge of impiety his accuser has brought against him.

### *The Theaetetus as a Literary Masterpiece*

As well as containing philosophical argument of the highest level, the *Theaetetus* displays Plato at the peak of his literary powers. It has an unusual dialogue 'frame', in which one friend of Socrates (Eucleides) explains to another how he got Socrates to help him to record the conversation. The frame serves as a tribute to the dying Theaetetus while highlighting an innovation: Plato has chosen to represent Eucleides' record as a *written* account which uses direct, not reported, speech. In the dialogue proper, the three participants are deftly characterized in the opening scene, set in a gymnasium where two elderly men, Socrates and the mathematician Theodorus, are watching the young exercising; Socrates asks his companion what bright young men are among his associates. Cue the introduction of Theaetetus: young, modest, talented, but scarcely good-looking with the snub nose and bulging eyes he shares with Socrates, he will prove skilful and inventive in discussion. By contrast, the boy's teacher Theodorus frequently protests that he's no good at abstract discussion, and has to be cajoled into defending his now deceased friend Protagoras. Even the dead



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Protagoras is given a lively characterization, by the device of having Socrates taking his part, imagining how Protagoras would defend himself against the criticisms.

Socrates' comparison of his art to that of a midwife is one of Plato's most enduring images. It ranks with another, rather different, comparison, made in the *Symposium* by Alcibiades when he likens Socrates to a statue of Silenus whose ugly exterior conceals inner riches in the form of 'divine arguments and effigies of goodness'. In stark contrast, Socrates here protests he is intellectually barren and his skill lies solely in his midwifery tending to the intellects of the young men around him—'watching over minds in child-birth'—helping some give birth, discerning a false pregnancy in some, delivering and discarding from others offspring that prove to be 'an imitation, not something true'. This last will be the fate of Theaetetus' intellectual offspring. Plato reminds the reader throughout the work of the allegedly barren midwife Socrates, despite the latter having come up with remarkable arguments and theories; the point is presumably to encourage readers to assess for themselves any intellectual offspring born in the course of the dialogue. Other striking images that Plato crafts are the Wax Tablet and Aviary models of the human mind offered by Socrates as he wrestles with the problem of how we can have false beliefs.

Halfway through, the informal to and fro of argument gives way briefly to a lofty and renowned 'digression' in which Socrates waxes lyrical in praise of the philosopher's leisured life of inquiry, by contrast with the petty concerns of lawyers and politicians. Plato, with his aristocratic birth, would have been expected to make his name in the political arena. The charming anecdote of the philosopher Thales, whose lofty thoughts led to his tumbling into a well, is balanced by heartfelt advocacy of serious and profound thought about justice itself, disregarding questions of who wronged whom in a particular case. Later Platonists made a watchword of the injunction 'to become as nearly as possible like a god'.

Above all, the sparkling conversational tone of the exchanges between Socrates and his dialogue partners enhances the reader's

pleasure, even during the most taxing stretches of argument. To quote Sir Philip Sidney: whoever reads Plato carefully 'shall find that in the body of the work, though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin as it were and beauty depended most of poetry' (*The Defence of Poetry*, 1595).

*Interpretations of the Theaetetus, Ancient and Modern*

Scholarly disputes rage, and have raged since antiquity, on how to read any of Plato's works. Are they dramas in which no speaker can be held to represent the author's views? Or can we assume that any theses put forward by the chief speaker, usually Socrates, are ones Plato himself held at the time of writing? We can be certain that the dialogues were not meant to be read as records of actual conversations Socrates held, even if some ancient readers such as Proclus seem to have viewed them as such. Should we, as some scholars suggest, take each dialogue as a self-contained work and refrain from trying to interpret it with the help of other dialogues? But to do so would be to disregard palpable echoes of other works that Plato seems to have included for the well-versed reader (many of them mentioned in the Explanatory Notes). When we turn to the *Theaetetus* in particular, the most pressing question is how to construe the ostensibly negative outcome of the whole work.

As explained above, the *Theaetetus* poses special problems to its readers. It is clearly a work of Plato's maturity and, to quote Sedley, was 'written with the *Republic* never far from view'.<sup>4</sup> But it takes the form of an inconclusive work featuring a know-nothing Socrates, while at the same time displaying sustained brilliance of argument, and containing allusions to the *Republic*, where Socrates had confidently put forward some weighty theories about knowledge and reality. As Sedley has noted, many ancient strategies of interpretation have found counterparts in modern criticism. The following remarks are intended for those who are curious about overall readings of the dialogue and its relation to Plato's other

<sup>4</sup> D. Sedley, 'Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*', in C. Gill and M. M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford, 1996), 86.

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dialogues. Those who prefer to take the theses and arguments on their own merits should proceed directly to the feast of philosophy that awaits them in the text itself.

### SCEPTICAL READINGS

One of the ancient strategies is that of the school of thought known as Academic Scepticism. Flourishing in the centuries after Plato wrote, its adherents took the view that we should read his dialogues as evidence, not of certain dogmatic views, but that (like them) Plato was a sceptic who rejected certainty. For such an interpretation of Plato the *Theaetetus* would have been good evidence, especially with Socrates' insistence that he is devoid of wisdom, and with the dialogue ending in failure to discover what knowledge is. Julia Annas endorses this approach: 'The obviously reasonable way to read *Theaetetus* is to see Socrates as arguing in it wholly *ad hominem*, though there is a history of attempts to find a hidden doctrinal agenda by those who dislike the *ad hominem* reading.'<sup>5</sup> By *ad hominem* arguments Annas must include arguments against the absent Protagoras and the Heracleiteans as well as against the suggestions of *Theaetetus*. However, in defeating the Man-Measure thesis Socrates seems to display certainty that it is wrong, and at other points he argues firmly for certain theses (for instance, 184–6). Treating Plato the author as a sceptic is not entirely convincing, even though the search for a definition fails in our dialogue. A great advantage to this approach, though, is that the readers are encouraged to think things out for themselves: something Plato surely intended.

### 'HIDDEN DOCTRINE' READINGS

'In inquiries he asks questions and does not make assertions, so that he posits neither a falsehood nor a truth; but to those well-versed in his methods he covertly indicates his own doctrine.' This remark, found in a fragmentary papyrus commentary on the

<sup>5</sup> J. Annas, 'Plato the Sceptic', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, suppl. vol. (1992), 52.

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*Theaetetus*,<sup>6</sup> describes the interpretative approach not only of that Anonymous Commentator, but of many writers ancient and modern. In recent times the most famous such interpreter is F. M. Cornford, in his *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*.<sup>7</sup> Commenting on the failure of all three definitions, he concludes,

The Platonist will draw the necessary inference. True knowledge has for its objects things of a different order—not sensible things but intelligible Forms and truths about them. . . . Hence we can know them (the Forms) and eternal truths about them. The *Theaetetus* leads to this old conclusion by demonstrating the failure of all attempts to extract knowledge from sensible objects.<sup>8</sup>

A subtle and innovative version of a 'hidden doctrine' reading is found in David Sedley's recent study *The Midwife of Platonism*.<sup>9</sup> Plato means us to read the work on two levels, he argues, keeping Plato the author apart from the character Socrates. Recognizably the same Socrates as portrayed in the early dialogues, disavowing wisdom but adept at probing the views of others, he pursues the inquiry into knowledge using familiar Socratic tropes (labelled 'the midwife's toolkit') but is innocent of the metaphysical theories Plato had given Socrates in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. The weightier views, however, according to Sedley, form the subtext of the work, and Plato the author expects the reader both to be put in mind of them and to understand that the historical Socrates 'paved the way' for mature Platonism. He was the midwife who helped his pupil Plato give birth to them. One advantage of this reading is that it allows us not to choose between alternative interpretations at points where there is much to be said for each, for example in the important section where perception is finally distinguished from knowledge by the observation that perception cannot grasp being. What does this mean? When first introduced, 'being' seems

<sup>6</sup> 'Anonymous Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*', ed. G. Bastianni and D. Sedley, in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici*, iii (Florence, 1995); cf. Sedley, 'Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*', 4.

<sup>7</sup> F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London and New York, 1935).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 162.

<sup>9</sup> D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism* (Oxford, 2004).

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simply to be the notion that, say, a colour *is something* or other (perhaps: is over there, or is bright). But, a few paragraphs later, grasp of being is connected with the mind's performing comparisons and calculations, and is said to be needed for grasping the truth (or perhaps the reality) of something, without which knowledge is impossible. Here we seem to need a meatier notion of being, more like essence or what something really is, with echoes of the expression of a similar idea in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. Sedley's two-level reading allows both the weaker and the stronger (Platonizing) interpretations to coexist, at different levels, in the text.

### THE *THEAETETUS* AS EVIDENCE THAT PLATO HAD CHANGED HIS VIEWS (FOR THE BETTER): A REVISIONIST READING

Many twentieth-century thinkers, prominent among them Gilbert Ryle, held that Plato's views developed and that he came to reject some unsatisfactory aspects of the Theory of Forms. Ryle held that Plato's *Parmenides* (to which Plato alludes at *Theaetetus* 183e) marks a turning point in Plato's thought.<sup>10</sup> It offered some telling criticisms of the Forms and in its second part showed a keen interest in the logical behaviour of abstract notions such as unity, being, likeness (compare *Theaetetus* 185–6). The moral Ryle drew from the focus on knowledge about the empirical world in the *Theaetetus* was the opposite from that drawn by Cornford: Plato is now interested in knowledge of a great variety of kinds—empirical as well as a priori—precisely because he is no longer wedded to a view that confined knowledge to the a priori knowable Forms and truths about them. It is undeniable that the *Theaetetus* shows a catholic approach to knowledge and its objects, and that it displays an interest in certain logical or abstract concepts such as being and sameness—to be greatly developed in later dialogues such as the *Sophist*. But, against the theory of Plato's change of mind, there

<sup>10</sup> Ryle, 'Plato's *Parmenides*'. Like Ryle, G. E. L. Owen, 'The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues' (1953; repr. in Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*), also found Plato recording a 'fresh start' in the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus*, but Owen's arguments for the earlier dating of the *Timaeus* have not been widely accepted.

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are signs in later dialogues such as the *Timaeus* that Plato still adhered to aspects of the theory Ryle hoped he had rejected, such as the Forms as paradigms for the created world. Indeed, we find in the *Timaeus*, as in the *Republic*, the claim that knowledge is different from true belief, having as its objects non-sensible but intelligible objects: the Forms (*Timaeus* 51e). We can certainly agree with Ryle that our dialogue presents itself as a fresh, new, and uncommitted investigation of knowledge, but the explanation Ryle gives, of a wholesale change of view on Plato's part, is not supported by the evidence.

### INTERPRETATIONS OF PART I, ON KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION

The long first part of the dialogue, with its detour through Protagoras' Relativism and Heracleitean Flux, has been understood in very different ways. An exotic theory of perception is introduced to underpin the claim that knowledge is perception (now married to the Protagorean Man-Measure theory that what appears to someone is the way it appears). But is the account of perception one that Plato himself endorses, as Bishop Berkeley and, later, Cornford believed? In favour of this, we note how lovingly it is developed and its striking similarities to the theory of perception expounded in the later *Timaeus*. Myles Burnyeat, in an important study,<sup>11</sup> labelled this Reading A, whereby Plato accepts this view of perception but naturally rejects its claim to be knowledge. On an alternative view, Reading B, favoured by Burnyeat himself, the perception theory was invented just to play along with and underpin relativism and flux, so that the refutation of these two brings the perception theory tumbling down too.

The choice is a difficult one. While it is quite clear that Socrates rejects full-blown relativism (see p. xi above) and an extreme version of the Flux theory, it is far less clear that he fully discards the theory of perception. The Explanatory Notes indicate points at which the theory is developed in extravagant and implausible

<sup>11</sup> M. F. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis, 1990).

## INTRODUCTION

ways (for instance, making it impossible that something looks or tastes the same to me at different times), so some aspects of it must be rejected, but perhaps Plato intends the reader to see some truth in its core. Another intriguing question about the perception theory is whether, as many critics believe, it prefigures Berkeley's thesis that objects are merely collections of (mind-dependent) ideas.<sup>12</sup>

### KNOWLEDGE AS TRUE BELIEF (OR TRUE JUDGEMENT) TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT: WHY IS THIS REJECTED?

'So it would seem, Theaetetus, that knowledge is neither perception, nor true judgement, nor an account added to true judgement' (210b). What are we to make of this conclusion to the dialogue?

We have already encountered one response, in a version of the hidden doctrine reading. Cornford's verdict was quoted on p. xix above: Plato expects the reader to realize that 'True knowledge has for its objects . . . not sensible things but intelligible Forms and truths about them.' Sedley agrees that the required moral is that knowledge has radically different objects from those of *doxa* (belief or judgement). He thinks that Plato saw this as the only way out of the dilemma argument that defeats the third suggestion about the kind of account that yields knowledge when added to true judgement, and he notes that the same theory—that the objects of knowledge are quite different from those of true belief—is found in the later dialogue *Timaeus* 51–2. A possible objection to that solution is this: early on (146e) Socrates rejects Theaetetus' answer in terms of geometry, cobblery, and other crafts with the words 'You weren't asked which things knowledge is of, nor how many kinds of knowledge there are.' If we take the first part of this seriously, we find the clear indication that we must look for what knowledge is, rather than what knowledge is *of* (or what is known). Sedley replies, however, that Plato's main point is in the second part, rejecting an answer in terms of a list of examples of knowledge. But even if Plato did (in writing the *Theaetetus*) think that all

<sup>12</sup> Those in favour of this reading include Burnyeat, *ibid.*, and Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism*. Hussey, 'Rescuing *Protagoras*', argues against.

knowledge involves Forms, that still leaves open the question what kind of cognitive grasp knowledge consists in, since presumably a person could have a cognitive grasp of Forms that fell short of knowledge. Indeed, Socrates in the *Republic* declares he has only *doxai*, beliefs or judgements, about the Form of the Good.

Some find an alternative moral relying on an earlier dialogue of Plato's, but this time on the *Meno*.<sup>13</sup> There Socrates claims to know that knowledge is different from true *doxa* (belief, judgement) and he proposes that knowledge differs 'by being tied down' (*Meno* 98a). 'True beliefs, when tied down by a working out of the explanation, become knowledge, and become permanent.' So someone who by luck has a belief that is true, or someone who has just memorized what they've been told without understanding, will not be able to explain why the belief is true, and so may easily change their mind and be persuaded of the opposite. But if that person has worked out the explanation, then what was previously a mere true belief becomes knowledge. Thus, readers familiar with the *Meno* will recall this famous definition of knowledge, and realize that, in his trawl of three kinds of account (201–10), Plato has passed over a more promising answer to the question of what, added to true belief, yields knowledge: a working out of the explanation.<sup>14</sup>

Now we seem to find something like this idea in *Theaetetus* 207d–208b, though without any explicit appeal to the need for possessing an explanation. It comes when Socrates uses the example of someone who can spell correctly the first syllable of a word (and so can give an 'account' in the sense of an enumeration of the letters), but gets the same syllable wrong in another word. This novice speller does not understand the principles of spelling, and so we don't credit him with knowledge even on the occasion he does give the right spelling of the syllable.

<sup>13</sup> This was apparently the approach of the Anonymous Commentator: see Sedley, 'The *Theaetetus*: Three Interpretations', in Gill and McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*.

<sup>14</sup> T. Chappell, *Reading Plato's Theaetetus* (Indianapolis, 2005), 200–1, is among those who draw this conclusion. His book offers a reading by which the entire dialogue is a criticism by Plato of empiricist thinking.



How well would that solution fit our dialogue as a whole? One difficulty lies in the very disparate kinds of knowledge under discussion in the *Theaetetus*. In the *Meno* Socrates is discussing knowledge of items such as the solution to a geometrical problem, and for such a case the idea that to *know* the answer one must grasp an explanation (that is, a proof) seems correct. (However, it fits less well with another example found in the *Meno*: the difference between the one who knows, and the one who merely has a true belief about, the way to Larissa.) But by the end of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates has turned his attention to knowing things such as Theaetetus, the sun, and a wagon. If we take the last of these, a wagon, we could think that an inquiry into what a wagon is would indeed require one to have a kind of explanation: given the function a wagon must fulfil, it must be of such and such a construction. But it is harder to see how we need something explanatory to ground our knowledge of Theaetetus. That's one difficulty in the suggestion that Plato expects us to remember and supply at the end of the work the definition of knowledge found in the *Meno*. Another difficulty is that we can raise against the *Meno*'s answer—knowledge is true belief plus an explanation—the very same dilemma argument found at the end of the *Theaetetus*, as follows. As well as having a true belief that  $p$ , must the would-be knower (i) have a true belief of the explanation for  $p$  or (ii) know the explanation? Perhaps the dilemma works against *any* definition of knowledge as true belief plus something further. The safest conclusion may be that Plato does indeed hold that one who knows must be able to give an account, in the sense of an explanation, of what they know, but has found difficulties in including that requirement as *part of the definition of what it is to know*.<sup>15</sup>

Here is a sample of other responses to the negative upshot of the dialogue. Gail Fine discerns hints of a solution at 207–8, and

<sup>15</sup> Cf. T. Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford, 2000), who argues that knowledge cannot be *analysed* as true belief plus justification, or indeed in any other way, but he concedes that truth, belief, and justification are among the consequences of knowledge. Williamson labels his thesis 'knowledge first', a slogan that perhaps also sums up the outcome of Part 3 of the *Theaetetus*.

proposes that Plato adumbrates what she calls an interrelation model of knowledge, a model she finds further developed in the later dialogues the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*.<sup>16</sup> On this view, knowledge of X still requires that the person be able to give an account of X, but this account will relate X suitably to other objects (Y, Z, etc.) in the same field as X. (As an example, consider how one can know and give an account of a letter, say a vowel, by showing how vowels relate to consonants in making up whole syllables.) Fine believes that Plato always held that knowledge must be based on knowledge, so that a would-be knower of X must know the account of X. Here we do indeed find circularity: accounts will ‘circle back on themselves’. This is, she argues, an acceptable feature of the interrelation model of knowledge and explanation.

M. L. Gill proposes the following upshot of the work:

Knowledge is a complex capacity to be defined on the model of clay [that is, the definition Socrates gives at 147c of clay as earth mixed with water]. Knowledge is analyzed into its conceptual parts—perception, true judgment and an account . . . perception picks out the object itself by itself and judgment matches it correctly to an impression of its essence.<sup>17</sup>

Gill also argues that Plato intends us to see that there are levels of knowledge, with only the highest level requiring that a person can make explicit an account of the object’s essence. Whether or not the details of Gill’s inventive reading are accepted, it certainly seems plausible to say that different kinds of knowledge, and maybe even different levels of knowledge, are recognized in the course of the discussion.

In his excellent commentary John McDowell suggests that by the end of the dialogue Plato has lost interest in the definitional task, given the rich harvest of other philosophical problems that the latter part of the discussion has thrown up.<sup>18</sup> These include the possibility of mistaken identifications, the relation of wholes to parts, and the issue of what is involved in knowing non-complex

<sup>16</sup> G. Fine, ‘Knowledge and *Logos* in the *Theaetetus*’, *Philosophical Review*, 88 (1979), 366–97, repr. in G. Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> M. L. Gill, *Philosophos: Plato’s Missing Dialogue* (Oxford, 2012), 137.

<sup>18</sup> J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), 238.

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things. On the last question McDowell, like Fine, discerns hints of the thesis that knowledge requires an ability to provide an explanation, specifically, in the spelling example at 207–8, an understanding of the principles according to which a syllable's letters combine to constitute it.

There is a wealth of excellent literature available for those who wish to pursue these interpretations further. For a first-time reader, the best strategy is to approach the text directly, never taking anything said by any of the speakers on trust but asking yourself at every stage whether a given move in the argument is convincing, and what alternative reply might have been given to a question. Many of the arguments are difficult, especially in the last third of the work, but Plato usually makes Socrates try hard to get the main issues across, as 190–2 shows well. We can be sure that Plato intended his readers to approach his writing in a critical spirit, looking more for interesting dialectical moves and arguments than for dogmas or doctrines.

The dialogue retains the fascination it has had for readers through the ages, from Aristotle to twentieth-century philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Gilbert Ryle.<sup>19</sup> It remains a classic in epistemology, enchanting readers with its wit and light touch while offering the most profound of arguments.

<sup>19</sup> F. J. Gonzalez, *Plato and Heidegger* (University Park, Pa., 2009), ch. 4, discusses Heidegger's varying responses to the *Theaetetus*.

## NOTE ON THE TEXT AND TRANSLATION

JOHN McDOWELL's translation was originally published in 1973, together with extensive notes offering a penetrating discussion of the philosophical aspects of the dialogue. The acclaimed translation has been retained almost unchanged; at 182c a small change has been made, and alternative translations for some passages are suggested in the Explanatory Notes. The Glossary discusses some key terms.

Since McDowell's translation, a revised version of the Oxford Classical Text of Plato has been published: *Platonis Opera*, volume I, edited by E. A. Duke, W. F. Hicken, W. S. M. Nicoll, D. B. Robinson, and J. C. G. Strachan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). It differs only in minor ways from the text McDowell translated, and in many places McDowell had anticipated changes the later edition incorporated. In a few places the text translated differs from that in the 1995 Oxford Classical text; such passages, marked with an obelus (†), are discussed in the Textual Notes (p. 152). Asterisks refer to the Explanatory Notes (pp. 111–51).

The numbers and letters that appear in the margins throughout the translation are known as Stephanus numbers; they are the standard way of making precise reference to passages in Plato's works. They refer to the pages and sections of pages of the edition of Plato published in Geneva in 1578 by Stephanus (Henri Estienne).

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## OUTLINE OF THE *THEAETETUS*

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206c–e        (i) Account as statement; refuted

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                  refuted

208c–210a    (iii) Account as distinguishing mark; refuted

210a–d    CONCLUSION

Knowledge is neither perception, nor true judgement, nor an account added to true judgement

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# THEAETETUS

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EUCLEIDES: Hello, Terpsion. Just in from the country, or some time ago?

TERPSION: A fair while ago. Actually, it was you I was looking for in the market-place, and I was surprised that I couldn't find you.

EUCLEIDES: Well, you see, I wasn't in town.

TERPSION: Where were you, then?

EUCLEIDES: I'd set out to go down to the harbour, but on my way I ran into Theaetetus, who was being taken to Athens from the army at Corinth.

TERPSION: Alive or dead?

EUCLEIDES: Alive, but only just. It's partly that he's suffering b from some wounds, but he's getting more trouble from the disease that's broken out in the army.

TERPSION: Dysentery?

EUCLEIDES: Yes.

TERPSION: That means he's in danger. What a man for this to happen to!

EUCLEIDES: Yes, Terpsion, a fine person. Actually, I've just been listening to some people waxing positively lyrical about what he did in the battle.\*

TERPSION: Yes, that's not at all out of the way; it would have been far more surprising if he hadn't been like that. But how c was it that he didn't stay here in Megara?

EUCLEIDES: He was in a hurry to get home; in fact I begged him and advised him to stay, but he wouldn't. So I went with him some of the way; and then, as I was coming back, I recollected with admiration how prophetically Socrates had spoken about him—as of course he did on other subjects too. It was shortly before his death, I think, that Socrates came across him, when Theaetetus was a boy. He met him and had a discussion with him, and he was extremely

impressed by Theaetetus' natural gifts. When I went to Athens, he repeated to me what they'd said in their discussion, which was well worth hearing; and he said that Theaetetus was absolutely bound to become famous, if he lived to be grown up.\*

TERPSION: Well, that seems to have been true. But how did the discussion go? Could you repeat it?

143a EUCLEIDES: Good heavens, no—anyway, not just out of my head. But I made notes on that occasion, as soon as I got home, and later, when I had time, I used to recollect it and write it down. And whenever I went to Athens, I used to ask Socrates again about what I didn't remember, and make corrections when I came back here. So I've got just about all of what they said written down.\*

TERPSION: That's true; I've heard you mention it before. Actually, I've always been meaning to ask you to show it to me, but I've put it off up to this moment. But what's to stop us going over it now? I certainly need a rest after my journey from the country.

b EUCLEIDES: Well, I went all the way to Erineum with Theaetetus, so I wouldn't mind a rest myself. Let's go along, and my servant will read to us while we're resting.

TERPSION: All right.

EUCLEIDES: Here's the book, Terpsion. Look how I wrote down what they said: I portrayed Socrates, not repeating it to me in the way he did, but carrying on the discussion with the people he said he'd had it with—he said they were Theodorus, the geometrician, and Theaetetus. It was so as not to have the written account made tedious by the bits of narration between the speeches—something about himself, like 'And I said' or 'And I remarked', whenever Socrates was speaking, or, again, something about the person who was giving the answers: 'He concurred', or 'He didn't agree'—that was why I cut out that kind of thing, and portrayed Socrates as himself carrying on the discussion with them.\*

TERPSION: Nothing wrong with that, Eucleides.

EUCLEIDES: Come on, boy, take the book and read it.

## SOCRATES THEODORUS THEAETETUS

SOCRATES: If I cared more about the people in Cyrene,\* d  
Theodorus, I'd be asking you about its affairs and its  
people—whether any of the young men there are taking an  
interest in geometry or any other way of cultivating wisdom.  
But as things are, I'm less fond of them than I am of the  
Athenians, and so I'm keener to know which of our young  
men are thought likely to turn out well. So I keep a look-out  
for that myself, as far as I can, and I ask other people about  
it too—anyone with whom I see that the young men like to  
associate. Now you have quite large numbers who come to  
you, and justly so, because you deserve it for several reasons, e  
and in particular for your geometry. So if you've come across  
anyone worth talking about, I'd be glad to hear it.

THEODORUS: Yes, Socrates, there is a boy I've come across  
among your compatriots: it'll be well worth my saying, and  
your hearing, what he's like. If he'd been handsome, I'd have  
been afraid to speak with emphasis, in case anyone thought  
I was in love with him. But as things are—you mustn't mind  
my saying this—he isn't handsome, but resembles you in the  
snubness of his nose and the prominence of his eyes; though  
he has those features to a less pronounced extent than you.\*  
So I can speak fearlessly. You can be sure that of all the 144a  
people I've come across so far—and I've met a good many—  
I've never yet seen anyone with such extraordinary natural  
gifts. That someone should be quick to learn, to a degree  
that would be difficult for anyone else, more than usually  
good-tempered as well, and, on top of that, courageous  
beyond equal, is something that I wouldn't have thought  
could happen, and I haven't seen it happening in other  
cases.\* On the contrary, it's usual for those who are sharp  
and quick-witted, and have good memories, like this boy, to



- b combine that with being easily overbalanced into losing their tempers; they skitter about like unballasted boats, and their nature is excitable rather than courageous. And, on the other hand, those who are more weighty are sluggish, somehow, at confronting their lessons, and burdened with forgetfulness. But this boy approaches his lessons and inquiries so smoothly, sure-footedly, and successfully, and with such good humour—like a stream of oil flowing along without a sound—that one is astonished at his managing them so well at his age.

SOCRATES: That's good news. And whose son is he?

THEODORUS: I've heard the name, but I don't remember it.

- c But he's the middle one of those boys who are coming towards us now. Just now he and those friends of his were rubbing themselves with oil\* in the track outside, but now I think they've finished doing that and they're coming here. Look and see if you know him.

SOCRATES: Yes, I do: he's the son of Euphronius of Sounium, a man very much of the sort you describe this boy as being. He was well thought of in general, and what's more, he also left quite substantial property. But I don't know the boy's name.

- d THEODORUS: His name is Theaetetus, Socrates; but his substance has, I think, been squandered by some trustees. All the same, generosity with his money is another of the things he's remarkable for, Socrates.

SOCRATES: You make him sound an excellent person. Do ask him to come and sit here with me.

THEODORUS: All right.

Theaetetus! Come over here to Socrates.

- e SOCRATES: Yes, do, Theaetetus, so that I, too, can look and see what sort of face I've got; because Theodorus says I've got one like yours. Still, if each of us had a lyre, and he'd said they were tuned alike, would we have believed him straight away, or would we have investigated whether he was speaking as an expert in music?

THEAETETUS: We'd have investigated.

SOCRATES: And if we'd found he was that sort of person, we'd have been convinced, but if we'd found he was unmusical, we'd have disbelieved him?

THEAETETUS: That's true.

SOCRATES: And as things are, if we're at all interested in this likeness of our faces, I imagine we'd better look into whether 145a he's speaking as an expert in drawing or not.

THEAETETUS: Yes, I think so.

SOCRATES: Well, then, is Theodorus an expert in portrait-drawing?

THEAETETUS: Not so far as I know.

SOCRATES: What about geometry? Isn't he an expert in that either?

THEAETETUS: No, of course he is, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And also in astronomy, calculation, music, and everything connected with education?

THEAETETUS: Well, I certainly think he is.

SOCRATES: So if he says we're alike in some part of our bodies, whether praising us for it in some way or criticizing us, it isn't really worth paying attention to him.

THEAETETUS: I suppose not.

SOCRATES: But what if he praised the mind of either of us b for virtue and wisdom? Wouldn't it be worthwhile for one of us, when he heard that, to do his best to inspect the one who'd been praised, and for the other to do his best to show himself off?

THEAETETUS: Definitely, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well then, Theaetetus, now is the time for you to show yourself off, and for me to look on; because you can be sure that, though Theodorus has praised a great many people to me, foreigners as well as Athenians, he has never yet praised anyone as he did you just now.

THEAETETUS: That would be good, Socrates; but are you sure he wasn't joking? c

SOCRATES: No, that isn't the way Theodorus behaves. Come on, don't try to wriggle out of what you've agreed on the pretext

that he was joking—you don't want to have him actually forced to testify on oath, and certainly nobody is going to bring a charge against him. No, don't lose heart; stick to your agreement.

THEAETETUS: Well, I'll have to, if that's what you think fit.

SOCRATES: Tell me, then: you learn some geometry from Theodorus?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

d SOCRATES: And some astronomy, harmonics, and calculation?

THEAETETUS: Well, I do my best to, at any rate.

SOCRATES: Yes, so do I—from him and from anyone else whom I take to have some grasp of those subjects. All the same, although I do reasonably well with them in general, there's a small point that I have difficulty with, which you and our friends here must help me to look into. Tell me: learning is becoming wiser about what one's learning, isn't it?

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: And it's by virtue of wisdom, I imagine, that wise people are wise.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

e SOCRATES: Now, is that at all different from knowledge?

THEAETETUS: Is what?

SOCRATES: Wisdom. Isn't it the case that people are wise in precisely those respects in which they're knowledgeable?

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: So knowledge and wisdom are the same?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

146a SOCRATES: Well now, the point that I have difficulty with, and can't find an adequate grasp of in myself, is just this: what, exactly, knowledge really is.\* So can we put it into words? What do you all say? Which of us is going to be first to speak? If he goes wrong, and if anyone goes wrong when it's his turn, he'll sit down and be donkey, as the children say in their ball game; but if anyone survives without going wrong, he'll be our king, and set us to answer any question he likes.

Why don't any of you say anything? Theodorus, I hope

my love of argument isn't making me behave rudely? I'm only doing my best to make us start a discussion, and get to be on friendly and sociable terms with one another.

THEODORUS: No, Socrates, that sort of thing isn't rude in the least. But you must ask one of the boys to give you your answers, because I'm not used to this kind of discussion, and I'm not the right age to get used to it either.\* It would be quite suitable for these boys, and they'd make much more progress; because the fact is that youth is capable of progress in anything. You must go on as you began: don't let Theaetetus off, but put questions to him.

SOCRATES: Well, Theaetetus, you hear what Theodorus says. I imagine you won't want to disobey him; and it wouldn't be right for a wise man's instructions about this kind of thing to be disobeyed by someone younger than he is. Come on, be generous and tell me: what do you think knowledge is?

THEAETETUS: I'll have to, Socrates, since you and Theodorus tell me to. In any case, if I go wrong at all, you'll put me right.

SOCRATES: Certainly, if we can.

THEAETETUS: Very well then: it seems to me that the things one might learn from Theodorus—geometry, and the subjects you listed just now—are kinds of knowledge; and also that the arts of the shoemaker and the other craftsmen, all together and each individual one of them, are knowledge and nothing else.

SOCRATES: How generous and open-handed of you! You were asked for one thing, but you're offering several, and a variety instead of something simple.\*

THEAETETUS: How do you mean, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Perhaps there's nothing in it, but I'll tell you what I think. When you mention the art of the shoemaker, you mean nothing but knowledge of the making of shoes, don't you?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And what about when you mention the art of the carpenter? You mean nothing but knowledge of the making of wooden objects, don't you?

THEAETETUS: Yes, again.

SOCRATES: In both cases, then, you put into your definition that which each of them is knowledge of?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But that wasn't what you were asked for, Theaetetus. You weren't asked which things knowledge is of, nor how many kinds of knowledge there are.\* We put the question, not because we wanted to count them, but because we wanted to know what, exactly, knowledge itself is. Or isn't there anything in what I'm saying?

THEAETETUS: Yes, you're quite right.

147a SOCRATES: Here's another case for you to think about. Suppose someone asked us about some commonplace, everyday thing, for instance, clay, what, exactly, it is. If we answered 'Potter's clay, and oven-maker's clay, and brick-maker's clay', wouldn't we be absurd?

THEAETETUS: I suppose so.

b SOCRATES: In the first place, we'd be absurd, surely, in supposing that the questioner understands anything from our answer, when we say 'clay'—whether we add 'doll-maker's' or the name of any other craftsmen whatever. Or do you suppose anyone has any understanding of the name of something, if he doesn't know what that thing is?

THEAETETUS: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: So someone who doesn't know knowledge doesn't understand knowledge of shoes?\*

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: So if anyone is ignorant of knowledge, then he doesn't understand the art of the shoemaker, or any other art.

THEAETETUS: That's right.

c SOCRATES: So if one has been asked what knowledge is, it's absurd to answer by giving the name of some art. In that case one is answering by mentioning knowledge of something or other, and that isn't what one was asked for.

THEAETETUS: So it seems.

SOCRATES: In the second place, one is going on interminably

long way round, when it's possible to give a short and commonplace answer. For instance, in the case of the question about clay, the commonplace and simple thing, surely, would be to say that clay is earth mixed with water, and not to bother about whose it is.\*

THEAETETUS: It looks easy now, Socrates, when you put it like that. There's a point that came up in a discussion I was having recently with your namesake, Socrates here;\* it rather seems that what you're asking for is something of the same sort. d

SOCRATES: What sort of point was it, Theaetetus?

THEAETETUS: Theodorus here was drawing diagrams to show us something about powers—namely that a square of three square feet and one of five square feet aren't commensurable, in respect of length of side, with a square of one square foot; and so on, selecting each case individually, up to seventeen square feet. At that point he somehow got tied up. Well, since the powers seemed to be unlimited in number, it occurred to us to do something on these lines: to try to collect the powers under one term by which we could refer to them all.\* e

SOCRATES: And did you find something like that?

THEAETETUS: I think so; but you must look into it too.

SOCRATES: Tell me about it.

THEAETETUS: We divided all the numbers into two sorts. If a number can be obtained by multiplying some number by itself, we compared it to what's square in shape, and called it square and equal-sided.

SOCRATES: Good.

THEAETETUS: But if a number comes in between—these include three and five, and in fact any number which can't be obtained by multiplying a number by itself, but is obtained by multiplying a larger number by a smaller or a smaller by a larger, so that the sides containing it are always longer and shorter—we compared it to an oblong shape, and called it an oblong number.\* 148a

SOCRATES: Splendid. But what next?

THEAETETUS: We defined all the lines that square off equal-sided numbers on plane surfaces as lengths, and all the lines  
 b that square off oblong numbers as powers, since they aren't commensurable with the first sort in length, but only in respect of the plane figures which they have the power to form. And there's another point like this one in the case of solids.\*

SOCRATES: That's absolutely excellent, boys. I don't think Theodorus is going to be up on a charge of perjury.

THEAETETUS: Still, Socrates, I wouldn't be able to answer your question about knowledge in the way we managed with lengths and powers. But it seems to me to be something of that sort that you're looking for. So Theodorus does, after all, turn out to have said something false.

c SOCRATES: But look here, suppose he'd praised you for running, and said he'd never come across a young man who was so good at it; and then you'd run a race and been beaten by the fastest starter, a man in his prime. Do you think his praise would have been any less true?

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: And what about knowledge? Do you think it's a small matter to seek it out, as I was saying just now—not one of those tasks which are arduous in every way?

THEAETETUS: Good heavens, no: I think it's really one of the most arduous of tasks.

SOCRATES: Well then, don't lose heart about yourself, and  
 d accept that there was something in what Theodorus said. Always do your best in every way; and as for knowledge, do your best to get hold of an account of what, exactly, it really is.

THEAETETUS: If doing my best can make it happen, Socrates, it will come clear.

SOCRATES: Come on, then—because you've just sketched out the way beautifully—try to imitate your answer about the powers. Just as you collected them, many as they are, in one class, try, in the same way, to find one account by which to speak of the many kinds of knowledge.\*

THEAETETUS: But I assure you, Socrates, I've often set myself e  
to think about it, when I've heard reports of your questions.  
But I can't convince myself that I have anything adequate to  
say on my own account; and I haven't been able to hear  
anyone else saying the sort of thing you're asking for. On the  
other hand, I can't stop worrying about it either.

SOCRATES: Yes, you're suffering the pains of labour,  
Theaetetus; it's because you're not barren but pregnant.

THEAETETUS: I don't know, Socrates; I'm only telling you  
what I've experienced.

SOCRATES: Do you mean to tell me you haven't heard that I'm 149a  
the son of a fine strapping midwife called Phaenarete?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, I'd heard that.

SOCRATES: And have you also heard that I practise the same art?

THEAETETUS: No, I certainly haven't.

SOCRATES: Well, you can be sure I do. But you mustn't give  
me away to everybody else. You see, I've kept it secret that  
I have this art. It's one thing people don't say about me,  
because they don't know it. What they do say is that I'm  
very odd, and that I make people feel difficulties.\* Have you  
heard that too?

THEAETETUS: Yes. b

SOCRATES: Shall I tell you the reason?

THEAETETUS: Yes, please.

SOCRATES: Well, call to mind how things are in general with  
midwives, and you'll find it easier to understand what I mean.  
No doubt you know that none of them attends other women  
while she's still conceiving and bearing children herself. It's  
those who are past being able to give birth who do it.

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: They say it's Artemis who's responsible for that,  
because, being childless herself, she's the patron of child-  
birth. She didn't grant the gift of midwifery to barren c  
women, because human nature is too weak to acquire skill in  
matters of which it has no experience. But she did assign it



to those who are unable to bear children because of their age, in honour of their likeness to herself.\*

THEAETETUS: That's plausible.

SOCRATES: And isn't it both plausible and inevitable that midwives should be better than everyone else at recognizing women who are pregnant and women who aren't?

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

d      SOCRATES: Moreover, by giving drugs and singing incantations, midwives can bring on the pains of labour, and make them milder if they want to? And they can make women who are having a difficult labour give birth? And if they see fit to cause a miscarriage when the embryo is young,† they do so?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And have you also observed this characteristic of theirs: they're the cleverest of match-makers, in that there are no gaps in their wisdom as regards knowing which sort of woman should consort with which sort of man in order to produce the best possible children?

THEAETETUS: No, I didn't know that at all.

e      SOCRATES: Well, you can be sure that they pride themselves more on that than on cutting the umbilical cord. After all, consider the art which has to do with the care and harvesting of the fruits of the earth, and the one which has to do with knowing which sort of plant and seed should be put into which sort of earth. Do you think they're the same or different?

THEAETETUS: The same.

SOCRATES: And with a woman, do you think there's one art for this latter sort of thing and another for the harvest?

THEAETETUS: No, that isn't plausible.

150a      SOCRATES: No. But because of the wrong and unskilled way of bringing a man and a woman together which has the name of procuring, midwives, concerned as they are about their dignity, avoid even match-making, since they're afraid that because of the latter activity they may fall foul of the former charge. Whereas in fact it's surely real midwives, and they alone, who are the appropriate people to make matches correctly.\*

THEAETETUS: Evidently.

SOCRATES: Well now, that's the extent of the part midwives play; but it's smaller than mine. Because it isn't the habit of women to give birth sometimes to imitations and sometimes b to genuine children, with the difference not easy to detect. If it were, the greatest and most admirable task of midwives would be to distinguish what's true and what isn't: don't you think so?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, my art of midwifery has, in general, the same characteristics as theirs, but it's different in that I attend men, not women, and in that I watch over minds in childbirth, not bodies. And the greatest thing in my art is this: to be able to test, by every means, whether it's an imitation c and a falsehood that the young man's intellect is giving birth to, or something genuine and true. Because I have, in common with midwives, the following characteristic: I'm unproductive of wisdom, and there's truth in the criticism which many people have made of me before now, to the effect that I question others but don't make any pronouncements about anything myself, because I have no wisdom in me. The reason for it is this: God compels me to be a midwife, but has prevented me from giving birth. So I'm not at all wise d myself, and there hasn't been any discovery of that kind born to me as the offspring of my mind. But not so with those who associate with me. At first some of them seem quite incapable of learning; but, as our association advances, all those to whom God grants it make progress to an extraordinary extent—so it seems not only to them but to everyone else as well. And it's clear that they do so, not because they have ever learnt anything from me, but because they have themselves discovered many admirable things in themselves, and given birth to them.\*

Still, for the delivery it's God, and I myself, who are responsible. That's clear from the following point. There e have been many people before now who didn't know all this,

and held themselves responsible while thinking nothing of me; and, either of their own accord or because they have been persuaded by others, they have gone away sooner than they should have. And once they have gone away, they have miscarried the rest of their offspring because of the bad company they kept; and they have lost the ones which had been delivered by me, through rearing them badly, having set more store by falsehoods and imitations than by what's true. In the end they have come to seem incapable of learning, both to themselves and to everybody else. One of them  
 151a was Aristeides, the son of Lysimachus, and there have been a good many others. When they come back, begging for association with me and going to extraordinary lengths to get it, the supernatural sign that comes to me stops me associating with some of them, but with others it lets me, and those ones make progress again.\*

There's another experience which the people who associate with me have in common with women in childbirth: they feel pain, and they're full of difficulties, night and day—far more so than the women. And my art can bring on that pain, and end it.

b Well then, that's how it is with them. But there are some people, Theaetetus, who somehow don't seem to me to be pregnant. Once I know that they have no need of me, I'm kind enough to arrange matches for them, and, with God's help, I guess quite adequately whose intercourse they'd benefit from. I've given away several of them to Prodicus, and several to other wise and gifted gentlemen.\*

c Now here's why I've told you all this at such length: I suspect you're suffering pain—as indeed you think yourself—because you're pregnant with something inside you. So put yourself in my hands, bearing in mind that I'm a midwife's son and an expert in midwifery myself, and do your best to answer whatever I ask you as well as you can. And if, when I inspect the things you say, I take one of them to be an imitation, not something true, and so ease it out and throw it

away, you mustn't be angry with me, as women in their first childbirth would be about their children. There have been many people before now who have been so disposed towards me as to be ready literally to bite me, when I was taking some piece of silliness away from them. They don't realize that I do it out of goodwill; they're a long way from knowing that no god bears ill will to men, and that I don't do anything of that kind out of ill will: it simply isn't right for me to acquiesce in a falsehood and obscure a truth.\*

So start again from the beginning, Theaetetus, and try to say what, exactly, knowledge is. Don't ever say you can't; because if God is willing, and you keep your courage up, you'll be able.

THEAETETUS: Well, Socrates, with you encouraging one like that, it would be disgraceful not to do one's best, in every way, to say what one can. Very well, then: it seems to me that a person who knows something is perceiving the thing he knows.\* The way it looks to me at the moment is that knowledge is nothing but perception.

SOCRATES: Well done: you're right to come out with it like that. But now let's look into it together, to see if it really is genuine or the result of a false pregnancy. You say knowledge is perception?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, it looks as though what you've said about knowledge is no ordinary theory, but the one that Protagoras, 152a too, used to state. But he put that same point in a different way. Because he says, you remember, that a man is the measure of all things: of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not.\* You've read that, I take it?

THEAETETUS: Yes, often.

SOCRATES: And he means something on these lines: everything is, for me, the way it appears to me, and is, for you, the way it appears to you; and you and I are, each of us, a man?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's what he means.

- b SOCRATES: Well, it's plausible that a wise man wouldn't be saying something silly; so let's follow him up. It sometimes happens, doesn't it, that when the same wind is blowing one of us feels cold and the other not? Or that one feels slightly cold and the other very?

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Now on those occasions, shall we say that the wind itself, taken by itself, is cold or not cold? Or shall we accept it from Protagoras that it's cold for the one who feels cold, and not for the one who doesn't?

THEAETETUS: That seems plausible.

SOCRATES: Now it appears that way to each of us?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And this 'appears' is perceiving?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

- c SOCRATES: So appearing and perception are the same, in the case of that which is hot and everything of that sort. So† it looks as though things are, for each person, the way he perceives them.\*

THEAETETUS: That seems plausible.

SOCRATES: So perception is always of what is, and free from falsehood, as if it's knowledge.\*

THEAETETUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Now look here, what about this? Was Protagoras a man with no gaps in his wisdom, who issued that hint to us nondescript masses, while he told the truth to his disciples in secret?\*

- d THEAETETUS: What do you mean by that, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I'll tell you. It's certainly no ordinary theory: it's to the effect that nothing is one thing just by itself, and that you can't correctly speak of anything either as some thing or as qualified in some way. If you speak of something as big, it will also appear small; if you speak of it as heavy, it will also appear light; and similarly with everything, since nothing is one—either one thing or qualified in one way. The fact is that, as a result of movement, change, and mixture with one

another, all the things which we say are—which is not the right way to speak of them—are coming to be;\* because e nothing ever is, but things are always coming to be.\*

About this theory, we can assume the agreement of the whole succession of wise men, apart from Parmenides—not only Protagoras, but Heracleitus and Empedocles as well; and we can also assume the agreement of the best poets in each genre—Epicharmus in comedy and Homer in tragedy. When Homer spoke of ‘Oceanus, origin of gods, and mother Tethys’, he meant that everything is the offspring of flux and change:\* or don’t you think that’s what he’s saying?

THEAETETUS: Yes, I do.

SOCRATES: Well then, who could dispute against so big an 153a army, with Homer as its commander, what’s more, without making a fool of himself?

THEAETETUS: It wouldn’t be easy, Socrates.

SOCRATES: No, Theaetetus. Because actually the following points are satisfactory indications in favour of the theory: coming to be, and what passes for being, are produced by change, while not being and ceasing to be are produced by inactivity. For instance, the hot, or fire, which we’re told actually generates and governs everything else, is itself generated by means of movement and friction; and they’re changes. Isn’t it true that those are the ways in which fire comes into being?

THEAETETUS: Yes. b

SOCRATES: Moreover, the class of living things is produced by means of those same processes.

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Another point: the condition of the body is destroyed, isn’t it, by inactivity and idleness, but to a great extent preserved by exercises and change?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And what about the condition of the mind? Isn’t it the case that it learns lessons, and is preserved, and becomes better, by way of learning and practice, which are changes;

c       whereas by way of inactivity—that is, the absence of practice and learning—it not only doesn't learn anything, but actually forgets whatever it has learnt?

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So what's good is change, in both mind and body, and what's bad is the opposite?\*

THEAETETUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Well, need I say more? I could go on about absence of wind, still water, and all that kind of thing—about how states of inactivity rot things and destroy them, whereas states of activity preserve them. And on top of that, I might cap everything by producing Homer's golden chain.\* I could suggest that he  
d       means nothing but the sun; and that what he's indicating is that, as long as the heavenly cycle and the sun are in motion, everything is and is preserved, in the realms of both gods and men; whereas if that motion were tied down, so to speak, and brought to a standstill, everything would be destroyed, and, as they say, the whole world would be turned upside down.

THEAETETUS: Yes, Socrates. I think what he's indicating is precisely what you say.

SOCRATES: Well then, you must think like this. In the case of the eyes, first, you mustn't think of what you call white colour as being some distinct thing outside your eyes, or in  
e       your eyes either—in fact you mustn't assign any place to it; because in that case it would, surely, be at its assigned place and in a state of rest, rather than coming to be.

THEAETETUS: Well, how can I think of it?

SOCRATES: Let's follow what we said just now, and lay it down that nothing is one thing just by itself. On those lines, we'll find that black, white, or any other colour will turn out to have come into being, from the collision of the eyes with the  
154a       appropriate motion. What we say a given colour is will be neither the thing which collides, nor the thing it collides with, but something which has come into being between them; something peculiar to each one.\* Or would you be

prepared to insist that every colour appears to a dog, or any other living thing, just the way it appears to you?

THEAETETUS: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: And what about another man? Is the way anything appears to him like the way it appears to you? Can you insist on that? Or wouldn't you much rather say that it doesn't appear the same even to yourself, because you're never in a similar condition to yourself?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, I think that's nearer the truth than the first alternative.

SOCRATES: Well now, if what we measure ourselves against or touch had been large, white, or hot, it would never have become different by bumping into a different person, at any rate not if it didn't undergo any change itself. And on the other hand, if what does the measuring or touching had been any of those things, then again, it wouldn't have become different when another thing came up against it, or the thing which came up against it had something happen to it: not if it hadn't, itself, had anything happen to it. As things are, though, we carelessly get ourselves committed to saying things which are extraordinary and absurd: so Protagoras, and anyone who sets out to state the same doctrines as he does, would say.\*

THEAETETUS: How do you mean? What sort of thing?

SOCRATES: I'll give you a small example, and you'll know all the ones I mean. Take six dice. If you put four beside them, we say they're more than the four, in fact one and a half times as many; and if you put twelve beside them, we say they're fewer, in fact half as many. And we can't allow the case to be differently described; or will you allow it?

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: Well now, suppose that Protagoras, or anyone else, asks you this: 'Theaetetus, is there any way in which something can become larger or more numerous, other than by undergoing increase?' What will you answer?

THEAETETUS: If I answer by saying what I think with a view



- d to this present question, Socrates, I'll say that there isn't. But if I answer with a view to the one before, I'll be on my guard against contradicting myself and say that there is.\*

SOCRATES: Splendid! Well done! Still, if you answer that there is, it looks as if it'll turn out like that tag from Euripides: we'll find that your tongue is irrefutable, but not your heart.\*

THEAETETUS: That's true.

- SOCRATES: Well now, if you and I were clever and wise men, and had searched into all the contents of our hearts, we'd  
e spend the rest of our time from now on, since we'd have no more pressing business, in trying each other out; in the manner of sophists, we'd engage in their sort of battle, and bash argument against argument with each other. But since, as things are, we're ordinary people, we'll want first of all to inspect our thoughts themselves, in relation to one another, to see what, exactly, they are, and whether we find they harmonize with one another or absolutely fail to do so.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's certainly what I'd want.

- SOCRATES: So would I. And since that's so, we oughtn't we, to look again into the question what, exactly, these  
155a appearings in us are? We should do it in a leisurely way, because we've got plenty of time; and we mustn't get annoyed, but must really search into ourselves.

Now when we look at the first of them, we'll say, I imagine, that nothing could ever become larger or smaller, either in size or in number, as long as it was equal to itself. Isn't that so?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And, second, that a thing to which nothing is added and from which nothing is taken away undergoes neither increase nor diminution, but is always equal.

THEAETETUS: Definitely.

- b SOCRATES: Moreover, third, that it's impossible that a thing should be, later on, what it was not before, without having come to be and coming to be?

THEAETETUS: That certainly seems to be so.

SOCRATES: Well now, I think these three agreed statements

conflict with one another in our minds when we say what we do about the dice, or when we say this about me: while being just this size, without growing or undergoing the opposite, I can within the space of a year be both larger than a young man like you, now, and smaller, later on—not because I've lost any of my size but because you've grown. Because that c means I am, later on, what I wasn't before, though I haven't come to be it; because without coming to be it's impossible to have come to be, and since I haven't lost any of my size, I couldn't ever have been coming to be smaller.\*

There are thousands more cases of the same sort, if we're going to accept these ones. No doubt you follow, Theaetetus; at any rate, I should think you've had some experience of this kind of thing.

THEAETETUS: I certainly have, Socrates, and it's quite extraordinary what wonder I feel at the question what, exactly, is true about them. Sometimes I get really dizzy looking at them.

SOCRATES: Yes, Theodorus seems to have made not at all a d bad guess about your natural gifts. Because that experience, the feeling of wonder, is very characteristic of a philosopher: philosophy has no other starting-point, and the man who said Iris was the daughter of Thaumas\* seems to have been doing his genealogy not at all badly.

But do you understand by now why, according to the doctrines we're ascribing to Protagoras, those cases are the way they are? Or don't you understand yet?

THEAETETUS: No, I don't think I do.

SOCRATES: So you'll be grateful to me if I help you to dig out the truth that is hidden in the thoughts of a distinguished man—or rather, distinguished men? e

THEAETETUS: Of course, very grateful.

SOCRATES: Look around, then, and make sure none of the uninitiates is listening. They're the people who don't think there is anything other than what they can grasp firmly in their hands: they don't admit doings, comings to be, or anything invisible, as sharing in being.

156a THEAETETUS: You make them sound hard and repellent people, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Yes, they're quite uncultured. But the others, whose secrets I'm going to tell you, are much more subtle.\* Their starting-point, on which everything we've just been saying depends, too, is this: the universe is change and nothing else. There are two kinds of change, each unlimited in number, the one having the power of acting and the other the power of being acted on. From their intercourse, and their friction against one another, there come to be offspring, unlimited  
 b in number but coming in pairs of twins, of which one is a perceived thing and the other a perception, which is on every occasion generated and brought to birth together with the perceived thing.\* Now we have names for the perceptions, of the following sort: seeings, hearings, smellings, feelings of cold, feelings of heat; also what are called pleasures, pains, desires, fears, and others.\* The nameless ones are unlimited in number, but those which have been given names are extremely numerous. On the other side, the appropriate  
 c set of perceptions: colours of every kind with seeings of every kind,\* sounds with hearings in the same way, and the other perceived things with the other perceptions, coming into being from the same origin.

Well now, Theaetetus, what does this story mean to convey to us? What is its bearing on what came before? Do you see?

THEAETETUS: Not at all, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well, have a look at it, and see if we can get it finished off somehow. What it means to say is this. All those things are involved in change, as we were saying; but there's quickness or slowness in their changing. Now anything that is slow keeps its changing in the same place,\* and in relation  
 d to the things which approach it, and that's how it generates. But the things which are generated are quicker;† because they move, and their changing naturally consists in motion.

When an eye, then, and something else, one of the things

commensurable with it, approach one another and generate the whiteness they do, and a perception cognate with it—things which would never have come into being if either of the former pair had come up against something different—then at that moment, when the seeing, from the eyes, and the whiteness, from the thing which joins in giving birth to the colour, are moving in between, the eye has come to be full of seeing; it sees at that moment, and has come to be, not by any means seeing, but an eye that sees. And the thing which joined in generating the colour has been filled all round with whiteness; it has come to be, again, not whiteness, but white—a white piece of wood, or stone, or whatever it is that happens to have that sort of colour.\*

We must think of the other cases, too, in the same way: we must take it that nothing is hard, hot, or anything, just by itself—we were actually saying that some time ago\*—but that in their intercourse with one another things come to be all things and qualified in all ways, as a result of their change. Because even in the case of those of them which act and those which are acted on, it isn't possible to arrive at a firm conception, as they say, of either of them, taken singly, as being anything. It isn't true that something is a thing which acts before it comes into contact with the thing which is acted on by it; nor that something is a thing which is acted on before it comes into contact with the thing which acts on it. And what acts when it comes into contact with one thing can turn out a thing which is acted on when it bumps into something else.\*

The upshot of all this is that, as we've been saying since the beginning,\* nothing is one thing just by itself, but things are always coming to be for someone. We should exclude 'be' from everywhere; not that we haven't been forced to use it many times, even recently, by habit and lack of knowledge. But we oughtn't to, according to what these wise people say; nor ought we to admit 'something', 'someone's', 'my', 'this', 'that', or any other word that brings things to a standstill. We ought, rather, to use expressions that conform to the

nature of things, and speak of them as coming to be, undergoing production, ceasing to be, and altering; because if anyone brings things to a standstill by what he says, he'll be easy to refute in doing that.\* And we ought to speak that way both in individual cases and about numbers of things taken together in collections,\* to which people apply the  
 c name of man, stone, or any animal or kind of thing.

Well, Theaetetus, does that seem attractive to you? Would you like a taste of it—do you think it would satisfy you?

THEAETETUS: I don't know myself, Socrates; and I can't make out the truth about you either—whether you're saying it as something you think, or just trying me out.\*

SOCRATES: You're forgetting that I neither know nor claim as my own anything of that kind, but, on the contrary, I'm incapable of giving birth to them. I'm practising midwifery on you,\* and that's why I'm singing incantations, and offer-  
 d ing you bits to taste from the products of each group of wise men, until I can help to bring what you think out to light. Once it has been brought out, that will be the time for me to look and see if it turns out to be the result of a false pregnancy or genuine. Come on, persevere and don't lose heart; answer like a good brave man, and tell me what you think about whatever I ask about.

THEAETETUS: Ask away, then.

SOCRATES: Once again, then, tell me if you're satisfied with this: nothing is good, beautiful, or any of the things we were going through just now, but things always come to be so?

THEAETETUS: Well, as far as I'm concerned, when I hear you expounding it the way you have, it seems to me to be extraordinarily reasonable; something which ought to be accepted just as you've set it out.

e SOCRATES: Well then, let's not leave out what's missing from it. It's still deficient on the question of dreams and diseases, including madness, and all the cases in which one is said to

mis-hear or mis-see or mis-perceive in some other way. Because you know, no doubt, that in all those cases the theory we've just been expounding is by common consent thought to be refuted, on the ground that we certainly do get false perceptions occurring then, and, so far from its being the case that the things which appear to anyone actually are, it's quite the contrary: of the things which appear, not one of them is. 158a

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's quite true, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then what is there still left for one to say, if one lays it down that perception is knowledge, and that the things which appear to anyone actually are for the person to whom they appear?\*

THEAETETUS: I hesitate to tell you I've got nothing to say, Socrates, because when I said that just now you told me off for it. Still, I really wouldn't be able to object that people who are mad or dreaming don't make false judgements, when one lot of them imagine they're gods, and the others imagine they've got wings, and think of themselves, in their sleep, as flying. b

SOCRATES: Well, there is one dispute about them, especially about sleeping and waking, which you can surely call to mind, can't you?

THEAETETUS: What sort of dispute?

SOCRATES: Something I imagine you've often heard people asking: what evidence one would be able to point to, if someone asked at this very moment whether we're asleep and dreaming everything that we have in mind, or awake and having a waking discussion with each other. c

THEAETETUS: Yes, Socrates, it certainly is difficult to see what evidence one should use to prove it; because all the features of the two states correspond exactly, like counterparts. The discussion we've just had could equally well have been one that we seemed, in our sleep, to be having with each other; and when, in a dream, we seem to be telling dreams, the similarity between the two sets of occurrences is extraordinary.

SOCRATES: Well then, you see that it isn't hard to get a dispute  
 d going, since there are disputes even about whether we're  
 awake or asleep. What's more, the time we're asleep is equal  
 to the time we're awake, and during each period our minds  
 contend that what seems to be the case at the moment is  
 certainly true; so we spend equal periods of time saying that  
 each of the two sets of things are things which are, with simi-  
 lar insistence in each case.

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And the same argument applies in the case of  
 diseases and madness, except that the time isn't equal?

THEAETETUS: That's right.

SOCRATES: Well, is what's true to be determined by the length  
 or shortness of a period of time?

e THEAETETUS: No, that would be absurd in several ways.

SOCRATES: But have you any other clear way of showing  
 which of those judgements are true?\*

THEAETETUS: I don't think so.

SOCRATES: Listen, then, and I'll tell you what sort of thing would  
 be said about them by those who postulate that what seems to  
 anyone on any occasion is true for the person who thinks so.\*  
 They'd ask this question, I imagine: 'Theaetetus, suppose  
 one thing is entirely different from another: could it have  
 any power the same as the other thing? We're to understand  
 our question as being, not about something that's the same  
 in one respect and different in another, but about something  
 wholly different.'

159a THEAETETUS: Well, it's impossible that it should have anything  
 the same, in respect of power or anything else, if it's completely  
 different.

SOCRATES: So we have to admit that such a thing is unlike,  
 too, don't we?

THEAETETUS: Yes, I think so.

SOCRATES: So if it happens that something becomes like or  
 unlike something, either itself or something else, we'll say

that if it's made like, it becomes the same, and if it's made unlike, it becomes different?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, we must.

SOCRATES: Now we were saying earlier that the things which act are many, in fact unlimited in number, and the same with those which are acted on?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And also that if something has intercourse with each of two different other things, it will generate not the same but different things?

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

b

SOCRATES: Well now, let's talk about you and me and everything else, from now on, in terms of that same theory. Take Socrates healthy and, on the other hand, Socrates ill. Shall we say the one is like or unlike the other?

THEAETETUS: You mean, is the one whole, Socrates ill, like or unlike the other whole, Socrates healthy?

SOCRATES: You've got it perfectly; that's exactly what I mean.

THEAETETUS: Unlike, surely.

SOCRATES: So it's different, too, just as it's unlike?

THEAETETUS: Yes, it must be.

SOCRATES: And you'll say the same about Socrates asleep, and all the conditions we went through just now?

c

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well now, take any one of the things whose nature it is to act on something. Isn't it the case that when it gets hold of Socrates healthy, it will deal with me as one thing, and when it gets hold of Socrates ill, it will deal with me as another thing?\*

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So the pair of us—I, who am acted on, and it, which acts—will generate different things in each case?

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Now whenever I drink wine when I'm healthy, it appears pleasant and sweet to me?

THEAETETUS: Yes.



SOCRATES: That's because, in accordance with what we agreed  
 d before, the thing which acts and the thing which is acted on  
 have generated a sweetness and a perception, both of which  
 are moving simultaneously; and the perception, from the  
 thing which is acted on, has turned the tongue into a per-  
 ceiving thing, while the sweetness, from the wine, moving  
 round about it, has made the wine both be and appear sweet  
 to the healthy tongue.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's certainly what we agreed before.

SOCRATES: But when it gets hold of Socrates ill, then, in the  
 first place, it hasn't, in strict truth, got hold of the same person,  
 has it? Because it has come up against something unlike.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

e SOCRATES: So that pair—Socrates qualified in that way and  
 the drink of wine—have generated different products: a  
 perception of bitterness around the tongue, and a bitterness  
 which comes into being and moves around the wine. These  
 products have made the wine, not bitterness, but bitter, and  
 me, not perception, but a perceiving thing. Is that right?

THEAETETUS: Absolutely.

160a SOCRATES: So, for my part, I'll never come to be perceiving any  
 other thing in just that way; because there's another percep-  
 tion for the other thing, and it makes the perceiver otherwise  
 qualified and another thing. And, for its part, the thing which  
 acts on me will never, by coming into contact with another  
 person, generate the same product and come to be qualified  
 in just that way; because from another person it will generate  
 another product and come to be otherwise qualified.

THEAETETUS: That's right.

SOCRATES: Moreover, I shan't come to be qualified in that  
 way for myself, and it won't come to be qualified in that way  
 for itself.\*

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: On the contrary, whenever I come to be perceiving,  
 I necessarily come to be perceiving something; because it's  
 impossible to come to be perceiving, but not perceiving any-

thing. And whenever it comes to be sweet, bitter, or anything b  
of that kind, it necessarily comes to be so for someone; because  
it's impossible to come to be sweet, but not sweet for anyone.

THEAETETUS: That's quite so.

SOCRATES: Then what we're left with, I think, is that it's for each  
other that we are, if we are, or come to be, if we come to be,  
since necessity ties our being together,\* but doesn't tie it to  
anything else, or indeed to ourselves. So what we're left with is  
that we're tied to each other. It follows that, whether one uses  
'be' or 'come to be' of something, one should speak of it as  
being, or coming to be, for someone or of something or in rela-  
tion to something.\* As for speaking of a thing as being or  
coming to be anything just by itself, one shouldn't do that one-  
self, and one shouldn't accept it from anyone else either. That's c  
what's indicated by the argument we've been setting out.

THEAETETUS: That's quite so, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Now since what acts on me is for me and not  
someone else, it's also the case that I, and not someone else,  
perceive it?

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So my perception is true for me—because it's  
always of the being that's mine\*—and, as Protagoras said,  
it's for me to decide, of the things which are for me, that they  
are, and of the things which are not, that they are not.\*

THEAETETUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Well then, if I'm free from falsehood, and don't d  
trip up in my thinking about the things which are, or come  
to be, how could I fail to have knowledge of the things I'm a  
perceiver of?\*

THEAETETUS: You couldn't.

SOCRATES: So you were quite right to say that knowledge is  
nothing but perception. The three theories have turned out to  
coincide:\* that all things change, like streams, as Homer and  
Heracleitus and all that lot say; that a man is the measure of  
all things, as Protagoras, the wisest of men, says; and that, since  
that's so, knowledge proves to be perception, as Theaetetus e

says. Is that right, Theaetetus? Shall we say that's your new-born child, so to speak, and the product of my midwifery? What do you say?

THEAETETUS: I'm obliged to agree, Socrates.

161a SOCRAATES: So this is what we've produced at long last, whatever exactly it turns out to be. And now that the birth is over, we must hold its inspection ceremony, literally circling all round it in our argument, and looking to see that if what we've produced isn't worth bringing up, but a falsehood, the result of a false pregnancy, the fact doesn't escape us. Or do you think you ought, whatever happens, to bring up your offspring and not do away with it? Will you be able to bear seeing it refuted, and not be very angry if someone takes it away from you, when this was your first childbirth?\*

THEODORUS: Theaetetus will bear it, Socrates; because he isn't at all ill-tempered. But do please tell us, where does it go wrong?

b SOCRAATES: How fond of arguments you are, Theodorus! It's splendid in you, the way you think I'm a sort of bag of arguments, and will easily pick one out and say how that theory goes wrong. You aren't bearing in mind what's happening. None of the arguments ever comes from me; they always come from the person who is having the discussion with me. I know no more than he does, apart from a tiny bit, enough to be able to get an argument from someone else, who's wise, and to accept it in proportion to its merits. That's what I'm going to do now: I'm going to try to get an argument from Theaetetus, not to say anything myself.\*

THEODORUS: You put it better than I did, Socrates. Do that.

SOCRAATES: Well, Theodorus, do you know what I find surprising in your friend Protagoras?

c THEODORUS: What?

SOCRAATES: I was quite pleased with most of what he said, about how what seems to anyone actually is; but I found the

beginning of his treatise surprising—the fact that he didn't begin his *Truth* by saying that the measure of all things is a pig, or a baboon, or some other creature that has perception, still more out of the way than those. That would have been to begin what he said to us with something haughty and utterly contemptuous, proving that while we admired him like a god for his wisdom, he was actually no better in point of intelligence than a tadpole, let alone another human being.\*

What else can we say, Theodorus? We're asked to suppose that whatever anyone judges by means of perception is true for him; that no one is better at discriminating someone else's experience than he is, or more authoritative in investigating whether someone else's judgement is correct or false; that, on the contrary, as we've said several times, each person is himself the only one who can judge the things he does judge, and they're all correct and true. But if all that's to be so, then how on earth can it be the case that Protagoras is wise, so that he can justly think himself fit to be a teacher of others at high fees, whereas we're more ignorant, and have to go to his lessons, though each of us is himself the measure of his own wisdom?\*

How can we avoid concluding that Protagoras is playing to the crowd when he says that? I say nothing about my own case, and how much ridicule I'm bound to incur for my art of midwifery; and I suppose the same goes for the whole business of dialectic. It must be (mustn't it?) a long and protracted bit of foolery to set about inspecting and testing one another's appearances and judgements, if everyone's are correct;\* as they are, if Protagoras' *Truth*\* is true, and it wasn't as a joke that it issued its oracular sayings from the book's inner sanctum.

THEODORUS: Protagoras was a friend of mine, Socrates, as you said just now. So I wouldn't want him to be refuted by way of my making admissions. On the other hand, I wouldn't want to oppose you against my judgement. So get hold of Theaetetus again. He certainly seemed to be following you very well just now.

b SOCRATES: And if you went to the wrestling-rings\* in Sparta, Theodorus, would you think it proper to watch other people who were stripped, some of them with rather inferior physiques, and not take your own clothes off and show your figure?

THEODORUS: Why do you think not, if they'd give in to me and accept my persuasion? Just so, I think I'm going to persuade you now to let me watch, and not drag me into the ring now that I'm stiff, but have a bout with the partner who's younger and more supple.

c SOCRATES: Well, if that's what you'd like, Theodorus, your wishes are my own, as they say. So I must go back to the wise Theaetetus.

First of all, then, Theaetetus, tell me about the point we've just set out. Aren't you surprised if you're going to turn out, all of a sudden, to be no worse in point of wisdom than anyone whatever, man or even god?\* Or do you think the Protagorean measure isn't meant to be applied to gods as much as to men?

d THEAETETUS: No, I don't. And, to answer your question, yes, I'm very surprised. When we were going over the way they'd argue that what seems to anyone actually is for the person who thinks so, it looked to me like a very good theory; but now it has suddenly been overturned, and it looks quite the reverse.

SOCRATES: Yes, that's because you're young; so you listen carefully to debating-points and let them convince you. Protagoras, or someone else on his behalf, will reply to those arguments like this:

e 'Gentlemen, young and old, you're sitting about together making debating-points. You trot out the gods, whom I exclude from my speaking and writing, not discussing whether there are any or not,\* and you say things that the masses would accept if they heard them, for instance that it's strange if no man is to be any better in point of wisdom than any farmyard animal whatever.\* But there's absolutely no proof or necessity in what you say; on the contrary,

you’re relying on plausibility. If Theodorus, or any other geometrician, were prepared to rely on plausibility when he was doing geometry, he’d be worth absolutely nothing.’

So you and Theodorus must consider whether, about matters as important as these, you’re going to accept arguments depending on persuasiveness and plausibility.

163a

THEAETETUS: You wouldn’t say it was fair to do so, Socrates, and neither would we.

SOCRATES: So we must find a different way to carry on our investigation; that’s what you and Theodorus say.

THEAETETUS: Yes, a quite different way.

SOCRATES: Well, here’s a way for us to consider whether knowledge and perception are the same or different. After all, that’s surely what our whole argument has been aimed at, and it was for the sake of that question that we got this great number of strange doctrines going. Isn’t that so?

THEAETETUS: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: Well now, take the things we perceive by seeing or hearing them; shall we agree that, at the same time, we also know them all? For instance, before we’ve learnt the language of foreigners, shall we say that when they speak, we don’t hear; or that we do both hear and know what they’re saying? And again, if we don’t know letters, shall we insist that when we look at them, we don’t see them; or that, since we do see them, we do know them?

b

THEAETETUS: We’ll say, Socrates, that we know precisely that in them which we see and hear. We both see and know the shape and colour of the one lot, and we both hear and, at the same time, know the high or low pitch of the others. But we don’t perceive by seeing or hearing, and we don’t know either, what writing instructors and linguists teach about them.\*

c

SOCRATES: Excellent, Theaetetus. It will be worthwhile not to dispute that answer of yours, so that you can go on developing.

But look, here's another objection coming up. See how we can fend it off.

THEAETETUS: What sort of objection?

- d SOCRATES: It goes like this. Suppose someone asked: 'If someone has come to have knowledge of something at some time, and he still has, and preserves, a memory of that very thing, is it possible that, at the very time when he remembers it, he might fail to know the very thing which he remembers?' I seem to be taking a long time to say it; what I mean to ask is whether someone who has come to know something and remembers it might not know it.\*

THEAETETUS: How could he, Socrates? What you're describing would be monstrous.

SOCRATES: So perhaps I'm talking nonsense? But look here: you say that seeing is perceiving and sight is perception, don't you?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

- e SOCRATES: So someone who has seen something has come to have knowledge of the thing he has seen, according to the theory we stated just now?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: What about this: you say there's such a thing as memory, don't you?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Of nothing, or of something?

THEAETETUS: Of something, naturally.

SOCRATES: Of things one has come to know and things one has perceived—that sort of thing?

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Then one sometimes remembers something one has seen?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Even when one has shut one's eyes? Or does one forget when one does that?

THEAETETUS: It would be strange to say that, Socrates.

- 164a SOCRATES: Yes, but we have to, if we're going to save what we said before; otherwise it goes by the board.

THEAETETUS: I must say I'm suspicious, too, but I don't understand properly. Tell me how.

SOCRATES: Like this. We say that someone who sees has come to have knowledge of the thing he sees; because we agreed that sight, or perception, and knowledge are the same thing.

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And if someone sees something and has come to have knowledge of the thing he has seen, and then he shuts his eyes, he remembers it but doesn't see it. Isn't that so?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And this 'doesn't see' is 'doesn't know', since b 'sees' is 'knows'.

THEAETETUS: That's true.

SOCRATES: So it turns out that one can fail to know something of which one has come to have knowledge, while one still remembers it—because one doesn't see it. And that's what we said would be monstrous if it happened.

THEAETETUS: That's quite true.

SOCRATES: So it looks as if one gets an impossible result if one says knowledge and perception are the same.

THEAETETUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: So we must say knowledge is one thing and perception another.

THEAETETUS: It looks as if we must.

SOCRATES: Then what can knowledge be? It seems that we'll c have to start all over again from the beginning.

Oh, but what on earth are we thinking of doing, Theaetetus?

THEAETETUS: About what?

SOCRATES: It looks to me as if, like an ill-bred fighting cock, we've jumped off the theory and started crowing before we've beaten it.

THEAETETUS: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: It seems we're satisfied to have reached agreement in a logic-chopping way,\* with a view to verbal consistency, and to have got the better of the theory by that sort of method.



- d We profess to be, not controversialists, but philosophers; but we haven't noticed that we're doing the same as those clever gentlemen.

THEAETETUS: I still don't understand what you mean.

SOCRATES: Well, I'll try to make clear what I have in mind about it. We asked whether someone who has come to know something, and remembers it, can fail to know it. By showing that someone who has seen something and shut his eyes remembers it but doesn't see it, we showed that he doesn't know it, even though he does, at the same time, remember it; and that, we said, is impossible. That's how the Protagorean story came to grief, and yours, too, at the same time—the one about knowledge and perception being the same.

- e THEAETETUS: Yes, that seems to be so.

SOCRATES: But I don't think that would have happened if the first story's father had been alive; he'd have done a great deal to defend it. As things are, it's an orphan, and we're trampling it into the mud. Not even the trustees Protagoras left—Theodorus here is one of them—are prepared to come to its support. It looks as if you and I will have to come to its support ourselves,\* to see that justice is done.

- 165a THEODORUS: Yes, Socrates, because it's not I but rather Callias, the son of Hipponicus, who's the trustee in charge of Protagoras' things. I turned away a bit too soon from bare argument to geometry.\* Still, I'll be grateful to you if you do come to his support.

SOCRATES: Good, Theodorus. Well, have a look at the support I offer. The point is, one would have to make even stranger admissions than the ones we've just had, if one didn't pay attention to expressions: as we usually don't, in our assertions and denials. Shall I explain how that's so to you or to Theaetetus?

- b THEODORUS: To all of us; but it had better be the younger one who gives the answers, because it won't be so unseemly if he trips up.

SOCRATES: Well then, let me state the most formidable question of all. It's something like this, I think: 'Is it possible that

the same person should both know something and not know the thing he knows?''\*

THEODORUS: What are we going to answer, Theaetetus?

THEAETETUS: I think it's impossible.

SOCRATES: Not if you're going to lay it down that seeing is knowing. Because suppose you're caught in a trap, as they say, and a man who can't be deflected asks you a question you can't escape; he covers one of your eyes with his hand, and asks if you see his coat with the one that's covered. How c will you deal with the question?

THEAETETUS: I think I'll say: not with that one, but with the other one.

SOCRATES: So you both see and don't see the same thing at the same time?

THEAETETUS: Yes, in the sort of way I said, anyway.\*

SOCRATES: 'But that's not at all the question I'm setting you,' he'll say. 'What I asked wasn't in what way you can fail to know something which you also know, but whether it can happen at all. In this present case, it's clear that you see something which you don't see. And you have in fact agreed that seeing is knowing and not seeing is not knowing. So work out what your conclusion is from those premisses.'

THEAETETUS: By my reckoning, the opposite of what I put d forward.\*

SOCRATES: Yes, and you might well have had more of the same sort of thing happen to you. Someone might have gone on to ask you if it's possible to know clearly and possible to know dimly; or if it's possible to know from nearby and not from far away; or if it's possible to know the same thing intensely and mildly; or thousands of other questions which a mercenary soldier in arguments—an expert at cut and thrust—might lie in ambush to put to you, once you've laid it down that knowledge and perception are the same thing. He'd launch an attack on hearing and smelling and other perceptions of that kind, and he'd keep on refuting you, e without letting go, until you were full of admiration for his

enviable wisdom and he'd got you all tangled up.\* Then he'd take you prisoner and tie you up, and from then on hold you for ransom, at whatever price you and he agreed.\*

Well now, no doubt you'd like to ask what argument Protagoras will state: what reinforcements he'll bring up for his troops. Shall we try to say?

THEAETETUS: Yes, do let's.

166a SOCRATES: Well, he'll say all these things we've been saying in his defence; and he'll also come to close quarters, I think, showing contempt for us and saying:\*

'Good old Socrates! He frightened a child by asking him if it's possible that the same person should, at the same time, remember and not know the same thing; and when the child, in his fright, said it wasn't, because of not being able to see ahead, Socrates purported to have shown that the laugh in the argument was on me. You're very idle, Socrates! The fact of the matter is this: when it's something of mine that you're investigating by putting questions, I'm refuted if the person who had the question put to him trips up because of  
 b giving the sort of answer I'd give; if he has given a different sort of answer, he's the one who is refuted—the person who had the question put to him. Because—to begin with—do you think anyone is going to concede to you that when one is no longer experiencing something, one can have present in one a memory of that thing which is itself an experience of the same sort as the original one?\*' Far from it. Or again, do you think anyone is going to hesitate to admit that it's possible for the same person both to know and not to know the same thing? Or, supposing someone is afraid to say that, do you think anyone is ever going to grant that a person who is altering is the same person as he was before the altering began? Or rather, that one is a person at all, and not people, coming into being in unlimited numbers, too, as long as  
 c alteration goes on? Not if we're going to have to be on our guard against one another's attempts to chase after words.\*

‘Come on,’ he’ll say, ‘behave a bit more like a gentleman. Attack what I actually say, and refute it, if you can, by showing that perceptions don’t come into being peculiar to each of us, or that, even if they do, it doesn’t follow that what appears comes to be, or, if we must use the word, is, only for the person to whom it appears. When you talk about pigs and baboons, you’re not only acting like a pig yourself but also persuading your hearers to treat my writings in that way; and that’s a dishonourable thing to do.

‘Because I do say that the truth is as I’ve written: each of us d is the measure of the things which are and the things which are not. Nevertheless, there’s an immense difference between one man and another in just this respect: the things which are and appear to one man are different from those which are and appear to another. As for wisdom or a wise man, I’m nowhere near saying there’s no such thing; on the contrary, I do apply the word “wise”, to precisely this sort of person: anyone who can effect a change in one of us, to whom bad things appear and are, and make good things both appear and be for him.\* Here again, don’t chase after what I’ve said on the basis of e how it’s expressed; but let me tell you still more clearly what I mean. Remember the sort of thing you were saying before: to a sick man what he eats appears, and is, bitter, whereas to a healthy man it is, and appears, the opposite. Now what must be done isn’t to make either of them wiser, because that isn’t even possible; nor is it to accuse the sick one of being ignorant 167a because he makes the sort of judgements he does, and call the healthy one wise because he makes judgements of a different sort. What must be done is to effect a change in one direction; because one of the two conditions is better. In education, too, in the same way, a change must be effected from one of two conditions to the better one; but whereas a doctor makes the change with drugs, a sophist does it with things he says.

‘It’s not that anyone ever makes someone whose judgements are false come, later on, to judge what’s true: after all, it isn’t possible to have in one’s judgements the things which

b are not,\* or anything other than what one's experiencing, which is always true. What does happen, I think, is this: when, because of a harmful condition in his mind, someone has in his judgements things which are akin to that condition, then by means of a beneficial condition one makes him have in his judgements things of that same sort—appearances which some people, because of ignorance, call true; but I call them better than the first sort, but not at all truer.\*

c 'And as for the wise, Socrates, I'm nowhere near calling them frogs.\* On the contrary, where bodies are concerned, I say it's doctors who are the wise, and where plants are concerned, gardeners—because I claim that they, too, whenever any of their plants are sick, instil perceptions that are beneficial and healthy, and true too, into them, instead of harmful ones.\* My claim is, too, that wise and good politicians make beneficial things, instead of harmful ones, seem to their states to be just. If any sort of thing seems just and admirable to any state, then it actually is just and admirable for it, as long as that state accepts it,\* but a wise man makes beneficial things be and seem just and admirable to them, instead of any harmful things which used to be so for them. And according to the same principle the sophist is wise, too, in that he can educate his pupils in that way; and he deserves a  
d lot of money from those he has educated.\*

'Thus it's true, both that some people are wiser than others, and that no one judges what's false; and you have to put up with being a measure whether you like it or not,\* because that doctrine of mine is saved on these grounds.

e 'If you can go back to the beginning and dispute it, do so. Set out your objections in a speech; or, if you like, do it by asking questions,\* because there's no need to avoid that method either: in fact, if one has any intelligence, one ought to pursue it more than any other. But whatever you do, don't be unjust in your questioning. It's quite unreasonable that someone who professes to be concerned about virtue should spend his time doing nothing but behaving unjustly in arguments.

Behaving unjustly, in this sort of pursuit, is what one is doing when one fails to keep separate the time one spends in controversy and the time one spends in dialectic. In controversy one may joke, and trip people up as much as one can; but in dialectic one should be serious, and help up the person one is talking to, showing up to him only those of his mistakes 168a where his tripping up was his own fault or due to the company he used to keep. If you behave like that, the people who spend their time with you will blame themselves, not you, for their confusion and difficulties; they'll run after you and like you, but they'll hate themselves and seek refuge from themselves in philosophy, so as to become different people and get rid of those they used to be. But if you do the opposite, like most people, you'll find the opposite will happen, and instead of making philosophers of those who associate with you, you'll make them turn out to hate the b whole business of philosophy when they get older.\*

'So if you'll listen to me, then, as was said earlier, you'll sit down with me, not in a spirit of ill will or contentiousness, but with a friendly attitude, and genuinely look into what we mean when we declare that everything changes, and that what seems to any private person or state actually is for that person or state.\* And you'll go on from there to investigate whether knowledge and perception are the same or different; but not as you did just now, arguing from the habitual use of expressions and words, which most people exploit by dragging them c around just anyhow, so as to cause one another all sorts of difficulties.'\*

Well, Theodorus, that's the beginnings of an attempt to support your friend. It's the best I can do—a feeble effort from my feeble resources. If he'd been alive himself, he'd have supported his own doctrines on a much grander scale.

THEODORUS: You're joking, Socrates. You've supported him very powerfully.

SOCRATES: It's good of you to say so.

d Now tell me: I take it you noticed how, when Protagoras was speaking just now, he told us off for addressing our arguments to a child, and arguing like controversialists against what he said, on the basis of the boy's fear? He labelled that a sort of frivolity: and he spoke solemnly about his measure of all things, and told us to be serious about his theory.

THEODORUS: Yes, of course I noticed, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And you say we must do as he tells us?

THEODORUS: Definitely.

e SOCRATES: Well, you see that all the people here are children, apart from you. So if we're to do as Protagoras tells us, it's you and I who must give his theory serious treatment by questioning and answering each other about it. That way, at least he won't have this charge to bring against us: that we examined his theory by way of a childish diversion with some boys.

THEODORUS: But look here, wouldn't Theaetetus be better at following an inquiry into a theory than a good many men with long beards?

169a SOCRATES: But no better than you, Theodorus. So stop thinking I'm under every obligation to defend your dead friend, whereas you're not under any. Come on: come with me a little way: just until we know whether it's you who ought to be the measure about diagrams, or whether everyone is as self-sufficient as you are in astronomy and the other subjects you have a reputation for excelling in.\*

b THEODORUS: It isn't easy to avoid saying something when one's sitting with you, Socrates. I was talking nonsense just now, when I claimed that you'd let me keep my clothes on and not make me take them off, like the Spartans. You seem to me to incline more in the direction of Sciron. The Spartans tell one either to take one's clothes off or to go away, but you seem to me to act a part more like that of Antaeus: you don't let go of anyone who comes up to you until you've forced him to take his clothes off and wrestle with you in an argument.\*

SOCRATES: You've found an excellent comparison for what's wrong with me, Theodorus. But I've got more endurance

than Sciron or Antaeus. Countless times already a Heracles or a Theseus, dauntless in arguing, has met me and given me a good thrashing, but that doesn't make me give up: such a terrible passion for exercise about these matters has infected me. So you, too, mustn't grudge me the chance of benefiting both of us, if you have a bout with me.

THEODORUS: I won't protest any longer: lead on, wherever you like. Whatever happens, one has to endure the thread of destiny which, about these matters, you spin\* for one, and submit to being tested. But I shan't be able to put myself at your disposal any further than the point which you proposed.

SOCRATES: Well, even that far will do. And please watch out that we don't produce some childishly frivolous form of argument without noticing it, and have someone telling us d off for that again.

THEODORUS: I'll try as hard as I can.

SOCRATES: Very well then, let's take up the argument at the same point as before. Let's see if we were right or wrong to be dissatisfied, when we criticized the theory on the ground that it made everyone self-sufficient in point of wisdom. We had Protagoras concede that some people are superior to others on the question of what's better or worse, and that it's those people who are wise.\* Isn't that so?

THEODORUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now if he'd been here and made the admission himself, instead of our conceding it on his behalf in the course e of supporting him, there wouldn't have been any need to take it up again and put it on a firm footing. But as things are, someone might perhaps rule that we haven't the authority to make admissions on his behalf. So it would be better to come to a clearer agreement about precisely that point; because it makes a great deal of difference whether it's so or not.

THEODORUS: That's true.

SOCRATES: Well then, let's get that agreement in the quickest



possible way, not through others but from Protagoras' own words.

170a

THEODORUS: How?

SOCRATES: Like this. He says, doesn't he, that what seems to anyone actually is for the person to whom it seems?\*

THEODORUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well now, Protagoras, we, too, are talking about the judgements of a man, or rather of all men, when we say that there isn't anyone who doesn't believe that he's wiser than others in some respects, whereas others are wiser than him in other respects. In the greatest of dangers, when people are in trouble on campaigns, or in diseases, or at sea, they treat the leading men in each sphere like gods, expecting them to be their saviours, because they're superior precisely in respect of knowledge. The whole of human life is surely full of people looking for teachers and leaders for themselves and other living things, and for what they do; and on the other hand, of people who think themselves capable of teaching and capable of leading. Now what can we say, in all these cases, except that men themselves believe that there is wisdom and ignorance in them?

b

THEODORUS: Nothing else.

SOCRATES: And they believe that wisdom is true thinking and that ignorance is false judgement?\*

c THEODORUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Well then, how are we to deal with your theory, Protagoras? Should we say that people always judge things which are true? Or that they sometimes judge things which are true and sometimes things which are false? Because from both alternatives it follows,\* I think, that they don't always judge things which are true, but judge both truths and falsehoods. Ask yourself, Theodorus, whether you, or any of Protagoras' followers, would be willing to contend that no one person ever believes of another that he's stupid and makes false judgements.

THEODORUS: No, that's incredible, Socrates.

d SOCRATES: Still, that's what the theory that a man is the measure of all things is inevitably driven to.

THEODORUS: How?

SOCRATES: When you've decided something by yourself, and express a judgement about it to me, let's grant that, as Protagoras' theory has it, that's true for you. But what about the rest of us? Is it impossible for us to get to make decisions about your decision? Or do we always decide that your judgements are true? Isn't it rather the case that on every occasion there are countless people who make judgements opposed to yours and contend against you, in the belief that what you decide and think is false?

THEODORUS: Good heavens, yes, Socrates, countless thousands, e as Homer puts it; they give me all the trouble in the world.

SOCRATES: Well now, do you want us to say that what you judge on those occasions is true for you but false for those countless people?

THEODORUS: It looks as if we must, at any rate as far as the theory is concerned.\*

SOCRATES: And what about for Protagoras himself? Isn't it necessarily the case that, if he didn't himself think a man is the measure, and if the masses don't either, as in fact they don't, then that *Truth* which he wrote wasn't the truth for anyone? Whereas if he did think so himself, but the masses 171a don't share his view, then, in the first place, it's more the case that it isn't the truth than that it is: more in the proportion by which those to whom it doesn't seem to be outnumber those to whom it does.\*

THEODORUS: Yes, that must be so, if it's to depend on each individual judgement whether it is or isn't.

SOCRATES: And, secondly, it involves this very subtle implication. Protagoras agrees that everyone has in his judgements the things which are.\* In doing that, he's surely conceding that the opinion of those who make opposing judgements about his own opinion—that is, their opinion that what he thinks is false—is true.

THEODORUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So if he admits that their opinion is true—that is, b

the opinion of those who believe that what he thinks is false—  
he would seem to be conceding that his own opinion is false?

THEODORUS: He must be.

SOCRATES: But the others don't concede that what they think  
is false?

THEODORUS: No.

SOCRATES: And Protagoras, again, admits that that judgement  
of theirs is true, too, according to what he has written.

THEODORUS: Evidently.

SOCRATES: So his theory will be disputed by everyone, begin-  
ning with Protagoras himself;\* or rather, Protagoras himself  
will agree that it's wrong. When he concedes that someone  
c who contradicts him is making a true judgement, he will  
himself be conceding that a dog, or an ordinary man, isn't  
the measure of so much as one thing that he hasn't come to  
know. Isn't that so?

THEODORUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well then, since it's disputed by everyone, it  
would seem that Protagoras' *Truth* isn't true for anyone: not  
for anyone else, and not for Protagoras himself.\*

THEODORUS: We're running my friend too hard, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But it isn't clear that we're running past where we  
ought. Of course he's older than we are, so it's likely that  
d he's wiser. If he suddenly popped up out of the ground here,  
from the neck up, he'd very probably convict me of talking  
a great deal of nonsense, and you of agreeing to it, and then  
he'd duck down again and rush off.\* But we have to make do  
with ourselves as we are, I think, and always say what seems  
to us to be the case. Let's do that now. Shouldn't we say that  
anyone whatever will admit at least this: some people are  
wiser than others, some more ignorant?

THEODORUS: Yes, I think we should.

SOCRATES: And also that the theory stands up best in the ver-  
sion in which we sketched it while we were supporting  
e Protagoras? It goes like this. Most things actually are, for

each person, the way they seem to him, for instance hot, dry, sweet, or anything of that sort. But if there are any questions on which it will concede that one person is superior to another, it will be about what's healthy and unhealthy. It would be prepared to say that not every creature—woman, child, or indeed animal—knows what's healthy for itself and is capable of curing itself. On the contrary, here, if anywhere, one person is superior to another.\* Is that right?

THEODORUS: Yes, I think so.

SOCRATES: And about matters that concern the state, too— 172a

things which are admirable or dishonourable, just or unjust, in conformity with religion or not—it will hold that whatever sort of thing any state thinks to be, and lays down as, lawful for itself actually is, in strict truth, lawful for it, and that on those questions no individual is at all wiser than any other, and no state is at all wiser than any other. But again, when it's a matter of a state's laying down what's advantageous or disadvantageous for it, it will admit that here, if anywhere, one adviser is superior to another, and the judgement of one state is superior in point of truth to the different judgement of another. It wouldn't have the face to say that whatever a state b thinks to be, and lays down as, advantageous to itself will, whatever happens, actually be advantageous to it. But in that other sphere I was speaking of—in the case of what's just or unjust, in conformity with religion or not—they're prepared to insist that none of them has by nature a being of its own; on the contrary, what seems to a community is in fact true at the time when it seems so and for as long as it seems so. At any rate those who don't altogether assert Protagoras' theory carry on their philosophy on some such lines as these.\*

But we're being overtaken by a new argument, Theodorus, a bigger one than the last. c

THEODORUS: Well, we've got plenty of time, haven't we, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Yes, we seem to have.

It strikes me now—I've often thought of it before, too—how natural it is that people who have spent a lot of time in philosophical pursuits should look ridiculous when they go into the law-courts to make speeches.\*

THEODORUS: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: If you compare people who have been knocking about in law-courts and such places since they were young with people who have been brought up in philosophy and  
d other such pursuits, it's as if you were comparing the upbringing of slaves with that of free men.

THEODORUS: In what way?

SOCRATES: In that the philosophers always have what you mentioned, plenty of time; they carry on their discussions in peace and with time to spare. For instance, look at us now, taking up one argument after another: we're already on our third. That's what they'll do, too, if the next argument to come up attracts them more than the one in front of them, which is what happened to us. It doesn't matter at all whether they talk for a long time or a short one, provided only that they hit on that which is.\*

e The others, on the contrary, are always short of time when they speak, because they're hurried on by the clock,\* and they aren't allowed to make speeches about anything they please, but the opposing counsel stands over them, equipped with compulsion in the shape of a document specifying the points outside which they may not speak, which gets read out while they're speaking. Their speeches are always about a fellow slave, and addressed to a master, who sits there with some suit or other in his hand. And their contests are never for some indifferent prize, but always for one that concerns themselves; often they're running a race  
173a for life itself. Because of all that, they become tense and sharp, knowing how to flatter their master with words and fawn on him with deeds, but small and crooked in their minds. The reason is that they have been deprived of growth, straightness, and freedom, by the slavery they have

suffered since they were young. It forces them to do crooked things, and imposes great dangers and fears on their minds while they're still soft; and because they're unable to withstand them with the help of justice and truthfulness, they turn at once to falsehood, and to retaliating against injustice b with injustice, and they get twisted and stunted in many ways. The result is that they finally come from youth to manhood with nothing healthy in their intellects; though what they think is that they have become clever and wise.

So that's what those people are like, Theodorus. But what about the members of our own chorus? Would you like us to describe them, or shall we leave them and go back to our argument? We don't want to go too far in exploiting that freedom to take up one argument after another which we were talking about just now.

THEODORUS: No, Socrates, let's describe them first. You were quite right when you said that in this sort of discussion it isn't c a matter of our dancing attendance on the arguments; on the contrary, the arguments are, so to speak, slaves to us, and each of them has to wait about, to get finished off when it suits us. We don't have a judge, or, like dramatists, a spectator, presiding over us to issue criticisms and commands.

SOCRATES: Well then, let's talk about them, since that's what you think fit. And let's talk about the leaders of the chorus, because there's no reason to talk about those who practise philosophy in a commonplace way. Now since their youth, to begin with, they haven't known the way to the market d place,\* or where to find a law-court or council chamber or any other public meeting-place of the state. They don't hear laws or decrees being pronounced, or see them written down. As for cliques, exerting themselves to win office, gatherings, dinners, banquets complete with flute-girls—even in dreams it doesn't occur to them to take part. Such a person is quite oblivious of whether someone in the state is well or ill born, or whether he has had some evil handed down to him from his ancestors, male or female—more oblivious

than he is of the proverbial number of drops in the sea. And with all those things, he doesn't even know that he doesn't  
 e know them. Because it isn't for the sake of a good reputation that he keeps away from them. On the contrary, the fact is that it's only his body that's in the state, here on a visit, whereas his intellect has come to regard all those things as of little or no account, and to despise them; it flies about every-  
 where, as Pindar says, 'in the depths of the earth' and on the surfaces when it does geometry, and 'above the heavens'  
 174a when it does astronomy, searching in every way into the total nature of each of the things which are,\* taken as a whole, but never settling on any of the things near it.

THEODORUS: How do you mean that, Socrates?

SOCRATES: In the sense of the story they tell about Thales,\*  
 Theodorus. The story is that he was doing astronomy and looking upwards, when he fell into a pit; and a Thracian servant, a girl of some wit and humour, made fun of him, because, as she said, he was eager to know the contents of heaven, but didn't notice what was in front of him, under  
 b his feet. That same gibe will do for everyone who spends his life in philosophy. Because such a person really does fail to notice his next-door neighbour: he's oblivious not only of what he's doing, but almost of whether he's a man or some other creature. But as for the question what, exactly, a man is, and what it's distinctively characteristic of such a nature to do or undergo, that's something he does ask and take pains to inquire into. You do understand, don't you, Theodorus?

THEODORUS: Yes, and you're quite right.

SOCRATES: Hence what happens when a man of that sort  
 c comes into contact with anyone else, either privately or in public. As I was saying when I began, whenever he's forced to engage in a discussion about what's at his feet and before his eyes, in a law-court or anywhere else, he raises a laugh, not just among Thracian girls but among the rabble in general, because his inexperience makes him fall into pits and into every possible difficulty. His gracelessness is terrible,

giving him a reputation for stupidity. When it's a matter of discrediting people, he has nothing specific to say to anyone's discredit, because, as a result of not having practised it, he knows no evil of anyone; so he finds himself in difficulties, and looks ridiculous. And when it's a matter of praise and the boasting of others, he makes himself conspicuous by laughing, not affectedly but genuinely, and is thought to be silly. Because if he hears a dictator or a king being eulogized, he thinks he's hearing some livestock-keeper, for instance a pigman or shepherd or cowherd of some sort, being congratulated on having got a high yield; except that he believes the animal which they tend and milk is more ill-tempered and prone to scheming than those which ordinary herdsmen deal with, and that lack of leisure is bound to make a man of that kind no less boorish and uneducated than herdsmen, penned in, as he is, by fortifications, like the herdsmen's fold in the mountains. When he hears of someone who owns ten thousand acres of land, or still more, as if that's a marvellously large estate, he thinks he's hearing of quite a tiny amount of land, accustomed as he is to looking at the earth as a whole. And when people wax lyrical about families, and talk about how noble someone is if he can point to seven rich forebears in a row, he believes that the praise is coming from people whose vision is entirely dim and short-sighted, unable, because of their lack of education, to look always at the whole, and work it out that everyone has had countless forebears and ancestors, including thousands and thousands of rich men and beggars, kings and slaves, foreigners and Greeks, in every case. When people give themselves airs over a list of twenty-five ancestors, and trace their descent back to Heracles, the son of Amphytryon, it seems extraordinary pettiness to him; he laughs at their inability to get rid of the vacancy of an unintelligent mind, and work it out that it was just a matter of chance what sort of person the twenty-fifth back from Amphytryon was, and what sort of person the fiftieth back from him was. In all those situations, then, a man of that kind



gets laughed at by the masses, partly because he seems to be arrogant, and partly because he's ignorant of what's at his feet, and gets into difficulties in every one of those situations.

THEODORUS: Yes, that's exactly what happens, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But things are different when he drags someone

- c upwards: when he finds someone prepared to give up asking 'What injustice am I doing to you, or you to me?', in favour of the investigation of justice and injustice themselves—what each of them is, and in what respect they differ from each other and from everything else; or when he finds someone prepared to give up asking 'Is a king happy?', or again 'Is a man with money happy?', in favour of an investigation about kingship, and human happiness and unhappiness in general—

- d what sort of thing each of the two is, and in what way it's fitting for human nature to obtain the one and avoid the other.\* When it's all those things that that man with the small, sharp, litigious mind has to give an account of, the tables are turned. He gets dizzy, suspended from a height and looking down from high up; because of his unfamiliarity with the situation, he feels dismay and difficulty, and with his stammering, he raises a laugh, not among Thracian girls or any other uneducated people, because they can't see him, but among people whose upbringing has been the opposite to that of slaves.

Well then, Theodorus, that's what each of them is like.

- e The one, whom you call a philosopher, has really been brought up in freedom and leisure, and it's excusable if he seems simple-minded and worthless when he gets involved in slave-like tasks: for instance, when he doesn't know how to make up a roll of bedding, or how to sweeten a dish or an obsequious speech. The other can perform any task of that kind smartly and quickly, but he doesn't know how to wear his coat like a gentleman, or how to take up the harmony of discourse and rightly hymn the life of gods and happy men.

176a

THEODORUS: Socrates, if you convinced everyone of what you're saying, the way you've convinced me, there'd be more peace and fewer evils among men.

SOCRATES: But, Theodorus, it isn't possible that evils should be destroyed; because there must always be something opposite to the good.\* And it isn't possible for them to become established among the gods; of necessity, they haunt our mortal nature, and this region here. That's why one ought to try to escape from here to there as quickly as one can. Now the way to b escape is to become as nearly as possible like a god;\* and to become like a god is to become just and religious, with intelligence. But it's not at all easy to persuade people that it's not for the reasons which the masses give that one ought to avoid wickedness and pursue virtue. The masses say that it's in order not to seem to be bad and in order to seem to be good that one should practise one and not the other. Now in my view that's what they call an old wives' tale, and we can state the truth like this. A god is by no means and in no way unjust, c but as just as it's possible to be, and there's nothing more like a god than one of us who has become as just as possible. It's in relation to this point that we find a man's true cleverness, or else his worthlessness and unmanliness. Because knowledge of this point is true wisdom and virtue, whereas ignorance of it is patent stupidity and vice. Anything else that passes for cleverness and wisdom is cheap, if it occurs in the exercise of political power, or mechanical, if it occurs in the exercise of skills. So if someone behaves unjustly, and says or does things not in conformity with religion, it's far and away the best course not d to concede to him that his sticking at nothing makes him clever. People take pride in that reproach, and think they're being told that they're not silly fools, useless burdens on the earth, but real men, the sort one needs to be if one's to survive in a state. So we should tell them the truth: they're just the sort of people they don't think they are, and all the more for not thinking so; because they're ignorant of the penalty for injustice, which is the last thing one should be ignorant of. It isn't what they think, beatings and executions: people sometimes behave unjustly and suffer none of those penalties. No, it's a penalty which it's impossible to escape. e

THEODORUS: What penalty do you mean?

177a SOCRATES: There are patterns set up in that which is, one of them divine and supremely happy, the other with nothing divine in it and supremely unhappy. Now, not seeing that that's so, they fail to notice, because of their foolishness and utter lack of intelligence, that through their unjust actions they're becoming like one of the patterns and unlike the other.\* For that they pay the penalty of living the life which resembles the one they become like. Now suppose we tell them that if they don't get rid of their 'cleverness', that region untainted by evils will not receive them even when they die, but here on earth they'll for ever lead a life resembling themselves, evil men associated with evils. If we do, they'll simply take it as a speech addressed to men who are clever and stick at nothing, by some people devoid of intelligence.

THEODORUS: That's quite true, Socrates.

b SOCRATES: I know it is. But there's one thing that does happen with them. When they have to exchange arguments in private about the things they find fault with, and when they're willing to endure it for some time, like men, instead of showing unmanliness by running away, it's strange how, in the end, they find themselves unsatisfactory on the subjects they're talking about; that oratory of theirs dries up somehow, so that they seem no better than children.

c But let's stop talking about all this, since it's all really a digression anyway.\* If we don't, we'll find that the further points that keep flowing up will swamp our original argument, Let's go back to what we were saying before, if you agree.

THEODORUS: I don't at all mind listening to this kind of thing, Socrates: it's easier for me to follow at my age. Still, let's go back to the argument, if that's what you think fit.

SOCRATES: Very well then. We'd reached roughly this point in our argument: we were saying that those who speak of being as moving, and who say that what seems to anyone at any time actually is for the person to whom it seems, are prepared

to insist on that doctrine in most cases, and in particular on the question of what's just: whatever things a state decides to be, and lays down as, just, in fact are just, whatever happens, for the state which lays them down, so long as they remain laid down. But on the question of what's good, no one would be brave enough to have the face to contend that whatever a state thinks to be, and lays down as, useful for itself actually is useful so long as it's laid down: not unless he's talking about the word.\* But that would surely be to make fun of what we're saying, wouldn't it?

THEODORUS: Yes, it certainly would.

SOCRATES: Well, let's suppose he's not talking about the word, but thinking of the thing to which it's applied.

THEODORUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But whatever word it applies to it, that's surely what a state aims at when it legislates, and it lays down all its laws, to the best of its ability and judgement, as being most useful for itself. Or does a state have something else in view when it legislates?

THEODORUS: Certainly not.

178a

SOCRATES: Now does each one always hit the target, or do they also miss on many occasions?

THEODORUS: I think they also miss.

SOCRATES: Well now, we'd be still more likely to get everyone to agree to that same point, if we began by asking about the whole class in which what's useful belongs. What's useful is surely something to do with the future. Because when we legislate, we lay down the laws for the time to come, in the belief that they're going to be useful; and we may rightly call that 'future'.

THEODORUS: Certainly.

b

SOCRATES: Come on, then, let's put this question to Protagoras, or anyone else who says the same as he does. Protagoras, you and your followers say that a man is the measure of all things which are white, heavy, light, or anything of that sort; because he has in himself the authority for deciding about them, and when he thinks they're the way he experiences them,

he thinks things which are true for him and things which are for him. Isn't that so?

THEODORUS: Yes.

c SOCRATES: But, Protagoras (we'll say), what about the things which are going to be, in the future? Does he have in himself the authority for deciding about them, too? If someone thinks there's going to be a thing of some kind, does that thing actually come into being for the person who thought so? Take heat, for instance. Suppose a layman thinks he's going to catch a fever and there's going to be that degree of heat, whereas someone else, a doctor, thinks not. Which one's judgement should we say the future will turn out to accord with? Or should we say it will be in accordance with the judgements of both: for the doctor he'll come to be neither hot nor feverish, whereas for himself he'll come to be both?

THEODORUS: No, that would be absurd.

d SOCRATES: And when it's a question of the future dryness or sweetness of wine, I should think it's the judgement of a vine-grower, not that of a musician, that's authoritative.

THEODORUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Again, suppose it's a question of what's going to be in tune or out of tune. An athletic trainer's judgement wouldn't be better than a musician's about what's going to seem, later on, to be in tune, even to the trainer himself.

THEODORUS: Certainly not.

e SOCRATES: And if someone who has no skill at cooking is going to be given a dinner, then while the banquet is being prepared, his verdict about the pleasure there's going to be is less authoritative than the chef's. Let's not make any contentions, at this stage in the argument, about what already is, or has come to be, sweet for anyone. But about what's going to seem, and be, for anyone in the future, is everyone best at deciding for himself? Or would you, Protagoras, be a better judge than any ordinary person, at any rate in anticipating what's going to be convincing to any of us in speeches meant for law-courts?\*

THEODORUS: Yes, Socrates, that was certainly a point on which he used to give firm assurances that he was better than anyone else.

SOCRATES: Good heavens, yes. Otherwise nobody would have paid a great deal of money to have discussions with him: not if he'd persuaded those who associated with him that about the future, too, there's no prophet or anyone else who can decide better than one can for oneself.† 179a

THEODORUS: That's quite true.

SOCRATES: Well now, legislation, too, and what's useful, have to do with the future, and everyone would agree that when a state legislates, it's inevitable that it should often fail to hit on what's most useful?

THEODORUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: So we'll be giving fair measure if we tell your teacher he's bound to admit that one person is wiser than another, and that it's that sort of person who's a measure; whereas someone with no knowledge, like me, is in no way bound to be a measure, though our argument just now, on Protagoras' behalf, was trying to force me to be such a thing whether I liked it or not.\* b

THEODORUS: Yes, Socrates, that seems to me to be the point by which the theory is most decisively refuted;\* and it's refuted also by the argument that it makes other people's judgements authoritative, and it turned out that those judgements involve believing that what Protagoras said isn't true at all.

SOCRATES: Yes, Theodorus, and there are several other ways in which one could refute something of that sort, and show that not every judgement of every person is true. But when it's a question of each person's present experience, from which there come to be his perceptions and the judgements which conform to them—well, it's harder to refute these latter and show they're not true. And perhaps I'm talking nonsense when I say that. Because it may be that they're impossible to refute. Perhaps the people who claim that they're quite clear, and that they're instances of knowledge, are saying things which are: c

- d and perhaps Theaetetus here wasn't far off the mark when he laid it down that perception and knowledge are the same thing.\*

So we must go in closer, as we were told to by our argument on behalf of Protagoras, and look into that being which is in motion, striking it to see whether it rings sound or flawed. Certainly there has been a battle about it of no small proportions, with quite a number involved.

THEODORUS: Yes, far from small; on the contrary, in Ionia it's actually increasing to an enormous extent, because the followers of Heracleitus\* put a great deal of energy into whipping up support for that theory.

- e SOCRATES: Well, that's all the more reason to investigate it, Theodorus; and from its starting-point, too, the way they put it forward themselves.

- THEODORUS: Yes, indeed. Actually, Socrates, you couldn't get a discussion about those doctrines—whether they're Heracleitean or, as you say, Homeric, or even earlier—with the people around Ephesus, who profess to be familiar with them, any more than you could with a maniac. Because, in literal conformity with their texts, they keep moving; as for stopping at an argument or a question and, without moving, giving an answer and asking a question in turn, there's less than none of that in them—or rather, 'not even none' is an exaggeration, in view of the fact that there isn't even a tiny bit of inactivity in those gentlemen. If you ask one of them a question, they draw out enigmatic little expressions from their quiver, so to speak, and shoot one off; and if you try to get hold of an account of what that one meant, you're transfixed by another novel set of metaphors. You'll never get anywhere with any of them. In fact they don't even get anywhere with one another, but take great care not to allow anything to be stable, either in what they say or in their own minds. I suppose they believe that that would be stationary; and they're totally at war with what's stationary, and, to the best of their ability, expel it from everywhere.\*
- 180a
- b

SOCRATES: Perhaps you've only seen them in battle, Theodorus, and not come into contact with them when they're at peace: after all, they're no friends of yours. I dare say that when they're at leisure they impart that sort of doctrine to their pupils: those whom they want to make like themselves.

THEODORUS: Pupils? What pupils? No, you don't find people of that sort becoming one another's pupils. They sprout up c of their own accord, wherever each one happens to draw his inspiration from, and each of them regards all the rest as knowing nothing. As I was beginning to say, you'll never get an account of them from themselves, either with or without their consent. We must take over the doctrine ourselves, and investigate it as if it were a geometrical problem.

SOCRATES: Yes, that's reasonable. Well then, what about this problem? We've had it handed down to us from the ancients, haven't we? They concealed their meaning from the masses with the help of poetry, and said that the origin of everything d else is Oceanus and Tethys, which are streams, and that nothing is at rest. And we've also had it from the moderns, who, since they're wiser, reveal their meaning openly, so that even shoemakers can listen to and learn their wisdom, and stop foolishly thinking that some of the things which are are at rest and some involved in change, but learn that everything changes, and honour them. Isn't that right?

But I was almost forgetting that there are others, too, Theodorus, who have pronounced the opposite doctrines to those ones: for instance, "Unchanging" is by nature such as e to be a name for the whole'† and all the other things which people like Melissus and Parmenides insist on, in opposition to all those others; to the effect that everything is one, and it's at rest in itself, not having a space in which to move.\*

Well then, how shall we deal with all these people? We've come forward little by little, and, without noticing it, got ourselves into the space between the two sides: and if we 181a don't manage to defend ourselves and escape between them, we'll pay the penalty, like people playing the game with the



- line in the wrestling-rings, when they get caught by both sides and pulled in opposite directions. Now it seems to me that we'd better start by looking into those whom we first set out to investigate, the flowing people. If there seems to be something in what they say, we'll help them pull us over to their side, and try to escape the others. But if there seems to be more truth in what's said by the partisans of the whole, we'll escape from
- b those who try to change what's unchanging, and run away to them. And if neither side seems to be saying anything reasonable,\* it will be absurd for us to think that inferior people like us can say anything useful, after we've disqualified men of their great antiquity and consummate wisdom.

So ask yourself, Theodorus, if it's worth going forward into so great a danger.

THEODORUS: Yes, Socrates: it would be quite intolerable not to investigate what each side says.

SOCRATES: Well, we'd better look into it, if you're so eager.

- c Well then, it seems to me that a starting-point for our investigation about change is this question: what sort of thing, exactly, are they talking about when they say that everything changes? What I mean is something like this: are they talking about one kind of change, or, as I think, two? But I mustn't be the only one who thinks so; you must share my opinion, so that whatever has to happen to us can happen to us together. Tell me: do you call it changing when something moves from place to place or revolves in the same place?

THEODORUS: Yes.

- SOCRATES: So let's take it that that's one kind of change. And
- d when something is in the same place, but grows old, or becomes black instead of white or hard instead of soft, or undergoes any other alteration, isn't it proper to say that that's another kind of change?

THEODORUS: Yes, one has to say so.

SOCRATES: So I say that there are these two kinds of change: alteration and movement.

THEODORUS: You're right.

SOCRATES: Well then, now that we've made that distinction, let's start a discussion with the people who claim that everything changes, and ask them this: 'Do you say that everything changes in both ways, both moving and undergoing alteration? or that some things change in both ways, and some in one way but not the other?'

THEODORUS: Good heavens, I can't say; but I think they'd say 'In both ways'.

SOCRATES: Yes: otherwise they'll find that things turn out to be both changing and at rest, and it will be no more correct to say that everything changes than to say that everything is at rest.

THEODORUS: That's quite true.

SOCRATES: So since things must be changing, and there mustn't be any absence of change in anything, everything must be always changing with every kind of change.\* 182a

THEODORUS: Yes, necessarily.

SOCRATES: Well now, consider this point of theirs. In the case of hotness, whiteness, or anything of that kind, we said (didn't we?) that they speak of their coming into being on these lines: each of them moves, simultaneously with a perception, between the thing which acts and the thing which is acted on; and the thing which is acted on comes to be perceptive, not a perception, whereas the thing which acts comes to be qualified in a certain way, not a quality. Now perhaps 'quality' strikes you as a strange word,\* and you don't understand it as a general expression; so let me tell you some particular cases. The thing which acts comes to be, not hotness or whiteness, but hot or white, and similarly with the rest.\* Because you remember, I take it, that we were stating the position like this in our earlier discussion: nothing is one thing just by itself, not even the thing which acts\* or the thing which is acted on; but as a result of their both coming into contact with each other, they give birth to perceptions and perceived things, and one lot come to be qualified in certain ways while the others come to be perceiving.

THEODORUS: Yes, of course I remember.

- c SOCRATES: Well then, let's leave aside the rest of their theory, whether they mean what we've been saying or something different. Let's concentrate our attention solely on the point we're aiming at in our discussion, and ask them this: you say that all things change and flow, don't you?\*

THEODORUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: With both the kinds of change we distinguished; both moving and altering?

THEODORUS: Yes, certainly; they must be, if they're to be completely changing.\*

SOCRATES: Well now, if things were only moving, and not undergoing alteration, we'd be able to say, surely, that the moving things flow qualified in such-and-such ways. Isn't that right?

THEODORUS: Yes.

- d SOCRATES: Whereas since not even this stays constant, that the flowing thing flows white, but it changes, so that there's flux of that very thing, whiteness, and change to another colour, in order not to be convicted of staying constant in that respect—since that's so, can it ever be possible to refer to any colour in such a way as to be speaking of it rightly?

THEODORUS: How could it be, Socrates? Indeed, how could it be possible to do so with any other thing of that kind, if it's always slipping away while one is speaking; as it must be, given that it's in flux?\*

- e SOCRATES: And what shall we say about a perception of any given kind, for instance that of seeing or hearing? Shall we say it ever stays constant in just that guise, namely, seeing or hearing?

THEODORUS: No, we mustn't, if everything changes.

SOCRATES: So we shouldn't speak of anything as a case of seeing, any more than as not a case of seeing, or as any other perception any more than as not that perception; at any rate, we shouldn't do so if everything is changing in every way.

THEODORUS: No.

SOCRATES: But Theaetetus and I were saying that perception is knowledge.

THEODORUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So when we were asked what knowledge is, we gave as our answer something which is no more knowledge than not knowledge.\*

THEODORUS: Apparently.

183a

SOCRATES: Well, our attempt at perfecting our original answer seems to have turned out admirably! We were eager to show that all things change, so that it might become clear that that answer was correct. But what has in fact become clear is, apparently, that if all things do change, then every answer, whatever it's about, is equally correct.\* both that things are so and that they're not so, or if you like, both that things come to be so and that they come to be not so, so as not to bring those people to a standstill by what we say.

THEODORUS: You're right.

SOCRATES: Yes, Theodorus, except that I said 'so' and 'not so'. One oughtn't even to use this word 'so', because what's so wouldn't any longer be changing; and, again, one oughtn't b to use 'not so', because that isn't a change either. No, those who state that theory must establish some other language, because as things are they haven't got expressions for their hypothesis: unless, perhaps, 'not even so', said in an indefinite sense, might suit them best.\*

THEODORUS: Yes, that would certainly be a most appropriate idiom for them.

SOCRATES: Well then, Theodorus, we've got rid of your friend, and we're not yet prepared to concede to him that every man c is the measure of all things, if he isn't an intelligent person. Moreover, we aren't going to concede that knowledge is perception, at any rate not according to the line of argument that all things change,\* that is, unless Theaetetus here has anything else to say.

THEODORUS: That's excellent, Socrates; because according to our agreement, I was to be released from answering you once

we'd done with those subjects—that is, when our discussion of Protagoras' theory had come to an end.

THEAETETUS: No, Theodorus: not until you and Socrates  
d have also discussed those who claim that the universe is at rest, as you proposed to do just now.

THEODORUS: What, Theaetetus? Are you teaching your elders, at your age, to act unjustly and go back on their agreements? No, you must get ready to answer Socrates' questions about the points that still need discussing.

THEAETETUS: All right, if he wants me to. But still, about the subject I mentioned I'd have very much preferred to listen.

THEODORUS: You're challenging cavalry to fight on level ground if you challenge Socrates to say something! Just ask a question, and you'll have something to listen to.

SOCRATES: No, Theodorus, I think I won't do as Theaetetus  
e asks—not about the subject he mentioned.

THEODORUS: Why not?

SOCRATES: I respect those who say that the universe is one  
and at rest, so that I wouldn't want to investigate them in a  
superficial way—and still more than Melissus and the rest,  
I respect one being, Parmenides. Parmenides seems to me to  
be, as Homer puts it, venerable and awesome. I met the great  
184a man when I was quite young and he was very old,\* and he  
seemed to me to have a sort of depth which was altogether  
noble. So I'm afraid, not only that we'll fail to understand  
what he said, and get still more left behind on the question  
of what he had in mind when he said it; but also—this is my  
greatest fear—that the theories that keep jostling in on us  
will, if we listen to them, make us lose sight of what our  
discussion has been aimed at, the question what, exactly,  
knowledge is. In particular, the theory we're bringing up  
now is unmanageably large in scope. If one examines it in a  
digression, it won't get the treatment it deserves; but if one  
gives it adequate consideration, it will be at great length, so  
that one will blot out the question about knowledge. We  
184b mustn't do either. What we must do is to try, by means of my

midwifery, to deliver Theaetetus of what he has conceived on the subject of knowledge.

THEODORUS: Well, if that's what you think, we'd better do that.

SOCRATES: Well then, Theaetetus, take your consideration of what has been said a bit further. You answered that knowledge is perception, didn't you?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now suppose someone put this question to you: 'With what does a man see things which are white and black, and with what does he hear things which are high and low in pitch?' I suppose you'd say 'With eyes and ears'.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: It isn't usually a sign of ill breeding to be easy-going with words and expressions, and not subject them to a strict scrutiny: in fact it's the opposite of that, rather, that's ungentlemanly. But sometimes it's necessary: as, for instance, now, it's necessary for me to take exception to a point in your answer on which it isn't correct. Because look here, which answer is more correct: that eyes are what we see with, or what we see by means of? and that ears are what we hear with, or what we hear by means of?

THEAETETUS: It seems to me, Socrates, that they're what we perceive each set of things by means of, rather than what we perceive them with.

SOCRATES: Yes, because it would surely be strange if we had several senses sitting in us, as if in wooden horses, and it wasn't the case that all those things converged on some one kind of thing, a mind or whatever one ought to call it:\* something with which we perceive all the perceived things by means of the senses, as if by means of instruments.

THEAETETUS: Yes, I think the second alternative is better than the first.

SOCRATES: Well now, here's why I'm subjecting you to such strictness about it: I want to know if there's something in us with which we get at not only white and black things, by e

means of the eyes, but also other things, by means of the other sense organs—doing it with the same thing in each case. If the question is put to you, will you be able to refer everything of that sort to the body? But perhaps it would be better that you should state the point by answering questions, rather than that I should interfere on your behalf. Tell me this. Take the things by means of which you perceive things which are hot, hard, light, and sweet. You classify each of them as belonging to the body, don't you? Or do you think they belong to something else?

THEAETETUS: No, they belong to the body.

185a SOCRATES: And will you also be willing to agree that if you perceive something by means of one power, it's impossible to perceive that same thing by means of another? For instance, you can't perceive by means of sight what you perceive by means of hearing, or perceive by means of hearing what you perceive by means of sight?\*

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: So if there's something which you think about both of them, it can't be something which you're perceiving about both, either by means of one of the two instruments or by means of the other.

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: Now take a sound and a colour. First of all, you think just this about them: that they both are?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And that each is different from the other and the same as itself?

b THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: And that both together are two and each is one?

THEAETETUS: Yes, that too.

SOCRATES: And you're able to raise the question whether they're like or unlike each other?\*

THEAETETUS: I suppose so.

SOCRATES: Well now, by means of what do you think all those things about them? Because it's impossible to get hold of

what they have in common either by means of hearing or by means of sight.\* Besides, here's another proof of the point we're talking about. If it were possible to raise the question whether both are salty or not, of course you'll be able to say c what you'd investigate it with: it would clearly be neither sight nor hearing, but something else.

THEAETETUS: Yes, of course: the power that's exercised by means of the tongue.\*

SOCRATES: Good. But what about the power which makes clear to you that which is common to everything, including these things: that to which you apply the words 'is', 'is not', and the others we used in our questions about them just now? What is that power exercised by means of? What sort of instruments are you going to assign to all those things, by means of which the perceiving element in us perceives each of them?

THEAETETUS: You mean being and not being, likeness and unlikeness, the same and different, and also one and any other number applied to them. And it's clear that your question is d also about odd and even, and everything else that goes with those. What you're asking is by means of what part of the body we perceive them with our minds.

SOCRATES: You follow me perfectly, Theaetetus. That's exactly what I'm asking.

THEAETETUS: Well, good heavens, Socrates, I couldn't say; except that I think there simply isn't any instrument of that kind peculiar to those things, as there is in the case of those others. On the contrary, it seems to me that the mind itself, by e means of itself, considers the things which apply in common to everything.\*

SOCRATES: Theaetetus, you're handsome, not ugly, as Theodorus was saying; because someone who speaks handsomely is handsome, and a fine person too. And besides being handsome, you've done me a favour: you've let me off a very long argument, if you think there are some things which the mind itself considers, by means of itself, and some which it considers by means of the capacities of



the body. That was what I thought myself, but I wanted you to think so too.

186a THEAETETUS: Well, I do think so.

SOCRATES: Well now, in which class do you put being? Because that's pre-eminently something that goes with everything.

THEAETETUS: I put it in the class of things which the mind itself tries to get hold of, by means of itself.

SOCRATES: And similarly with like and unlike, the same and different?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: What about beautiful and ugly, good and bad?

THEAETETUS: They, too, seem to me to be pre-eminently things whose being the mind considers in relation to one another, calculating in itself things past and present in relation to things in the future.\*

b SOCRATES: Hold on. It'll perceive the hardness of what's hard by means of touch, won't it, and the softness of what's soft in the same way?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But their being, and what they both are,\* and their oppositeness to each other, and the being, in its turn, of this oppositeness, are things which the mind itself tries to decide for us, by reviewing them and comparing them with one another.

THEAETETUS: That's quite right.

c SOCRATES: So there are some things which both men and animals are able by nature to perceive from the moment they're born: namely, all the things which direct experiences to the mind by means of the body.\* But as for calculations about those things, with respect to being and usefulness, they're acquired, by those who do acquire them, with difficulty and over a long time, by means of a great deal of troublesome education.\*

THEAETETUS: Definitely.

SOCRATES: Well now, is it possible that someone should attain truth if he doesn't even attain being?

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: And will someone ever have knowledge of something whose truth he doesn’t attain?

THEAETETUS: Of course not, Socrates.

d

SOCRATES: So knowledge is located, not in our experiences, but in our reasoning about those things we mentioned; because it’s possible, apparently, to grasp being and truth in the latter, but impossible in the former.\*

THEAETETUS: Evidently.

SOCRATES: Well now, are you going to call them by the same name, when they have such great differences?

THEAETETUS: No, that wouldn’t be right.

SOCRATES: Then what name do you give the first: seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling cold, feeling hot?

THEAETETUS: Perceiving, of course.

e

SOCRATES: So you call all of that, taken together, perception?

THEAETETUS: Yes, one must.

SOCRATES: And we say it has no share in the grasping of truth; because it has no share in the grasping of being either.

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: So it has no share of knowledge, either?

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: So knowledge and perception could never be the same thing, Theaetetus.

THEAETETUS: Evidently not, Socrates. It has now become absolutely clear that knowledge is something other than perception.\*

SOCRATES: But our aim in starting this discussion was to find out what knowledge is, not what it isn’t. All the same, we’ve made enough progress to stop looking for it in perception altogether, and look for it in whatever one calls what the mind is doing when it’s busying itself, by itself, about the things which are.

187a

THEAETETUS: I think that’s called judging, Socrates.\*

SOCRATES: Yes, you’re right.

So start again from the beginning: wipe out everything that has gone before, and see if you can get a better view,

now that you've come on this far. Tell me, once again, what, exactly, knowledge is.

THEAETETUS: I can't say it's judgement in general, Socrates, because there's false judgement as well; but perhaps true judgement is knowledge. Let that be my answer. If it turns out, as we go along, that it isn't as good as it seems now, we'll try to find something else to say.

SOCRATES: You're right to speak willingly like that, Theaetetus, rather than hesitate to answer, as you did at first. If we go on like this, one of two things will happen: either we'll find what we're after, or we'll be less inclined to think we know what we don't in fact know at all; and such a reward wouldn't be anything to complain about. Well, what is it that you're saying now? Is it that, whereas there are two kinds of judgement, one true and the other false, you're defining knowledge as the true kind of judgement?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes; because that's how I see things at the moment.

SOCRATES: Well now, I wonder if it's still worth raising, once again, a point about judgement . . .

THEAETETUS: What point do you mean?

d SOCRATES: It's rather bothering me now, and it often has before, so that I've got into great difficulties, by myself and with others. I can't say what, exactly, this experience is with us, and how it comes into being in us.

THEAETETUS: What experience?

SOCRATES: Judging something false. I'm still in two minds, now, as to whether we should let it pass, or investigate it in a different way from the one we took a short while ago.\*

THEAETETUS: Why not, Socrates, if it's at all apparent that we should? When you and Theodorus were talking about leisure just now, you said that there's nothing to hurry us on in discussions like these, and you were quite right.

e SOCRATES: You're right to remind me. Perhaps this isn't a bad moment to retrace our steps, as it were. Because it's better, surely, to do a small thing well than a big one inadequately.

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Well then, how shall we set about it? What is it, in fact, that we say? Do we say that there is, on every occasion, a false judgement, and that one of us judges what's true and the other what's false: this being naturally the case?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well now, aren't there just these possibilities for us, 188a  
in the case of everything and with each individual thing: either to know it or not to know it? Because at the moment I'm leaving out learning and forgetting,\* as being in between those two: at this stage they aren't at all relevant to the argument.

THEAETETUS: Well, Socrates, there's no other alternative, in the case of each thing, besides knowing it or not knowing it.

SOCRATES: Now it follows immediately that if someone makes a judgement, he has in his judgement\* either one of the things he knows or one of the things he doesn't know?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And it's impossible for someone who knows something not to know that same thing, or for someone who doesn't know something to know that same thing. b

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Well now, take someone who judges what's false. Is he thinking that things he knows are not those things but other things he knows? Is it that he knows both sets of things but on the other hand is ignorant of both sets of things?

THEAETETUS: No, that's impossible, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well, is it that he believes that things he doesn't know are other things he doesn't know? Is this possible: that someone who knows neither Theaetetus nor Socrates should get it into his thoughts that Socrates is Theaetetus or that Theaetetus is Socrates?

THEAETETUS: Of course not. c

SOCRATES: But surely it isn't that he thinks that things he knows are things he doesn't know, or that things he doesn't know are things he knows.

THEAETETUS: No, that would be monstrous.

SOCRATES: Well then, how can it still be possible to make a false judgement? Because outside these situations it's surely impossible to make judgements, since, in the case of everything, we either know it or don't know it. But it doesn't seem to be possible to make a false judgement anywhere within these situations.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's quite true.

SOCRATES: Well then, ought we to consider what we're investigating in a different way, proceeding, not by way of knowing and not knowing, but by way of being and not being?\*

THEAETETUS: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: Mayn't it simply be the case that if someone has in his judgement about anything the things which are not, he'll inevitably be making a false judgement,\* whatever else is true about his thoughts?

THEAETETUS: Well, that again is plausible, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And suppose someone asks us, 'Is what you've described possible for anyone? Is there anyone who could have in his judgement that which is not, either about one of the things which are or just by itself?' What will we say, Theaetetus? It looks as if our answer to that will be 'Yes, when he thinks something, and what he thinks isn't true'. Won't it?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well now, is there this sort of thing in any other case?

THEAETETUS: What sort of thing?

SOCRATES: That someone sees something, but there's no one thing which he sees.

THEAETETUS: Of course not.

SOCRATES: But if someone sees some one thing, then he sees one of the things which are. Or do you think the one is ever to be found among the things which are not?

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: So if someone sees some one thing, he sees something which is.

THEAETETUS: Evidently.

SOCRATES: And if someone hears something, he hears some one thing, and a thing which is. 189a

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if someone touches something, he touches some one thing, and a thing which is, since it's one?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's right too.

SOCRATES: Well now, what if someone judges? Doesn't he have in his judgement some one thing?

THEAETETUS: Necessarily.

SOCRATES: And if one has in one's judgement some one thing, isn't it the case that one has in one's judgement a thing which is?

THEAETETUS: Yes, I grant that.

SOCRATES: So if someone has what is not figuring in his judgement, he has no one thing in his judgement.

THEAETETUS: Evidently not.

SOCRATES: But if one has nothing in one's judgement, one isn't judging at all.\*

THEAETETUS: That seems clear.

SOCRATES: So it's impossible to have in one's judgement that which is not, either about the things which are or just by itself.\*

THEAETETUS: Evidently not.

SOCRATES: So making a false judgement is something other than having in one's judgement the things which are not.

THEAETETUS: Yes, it seems to be.

SOCRATES: So neither on these lines, nor on those we were considering a little while ago, is it established that there is false judgement in us.\*

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: Well, is what we call false judgement something that comes into being like this?

THEAETETUS: How?

SOCRATES: We say that there is such a thing as a false judgement, which is a sort of other-judging; it occurs when someone c

makes an interchange in his thinking and affirms that one of the things which are is another of the things which are. Because that way what he has in his judgement is always a thing which is, but he has one thing in his judgement instead of another, and, in that he misses what he was aiming at, he can properly be said to be making a false judgement.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, now you seem to me to have described it absolutely correctly. Because whenever someone has in his judgement ugly instead of beautiful, or beautiful instead of ugly, on those occasions he's making a truly false judgement.\*

SOCRATES: You obviously don't think much of me, Theaetetus; you're not afraid of me.

THEAETETUS: Why?

SOCRATES: I suppose you think I won't take exception to your  
d 'truly false', and ask you if it's possible to become slowly quick, or heavily light, or any other opposite in the manner of its opposite, not itself—that is, oppositely to itself. Well, I'll let it pass, so that your confidence shan't have been in vain. Now you say you're satisfied with the view that judging what's false is other-judging?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So according to your judgement it's possible to put something in one's thoughts as being something else, not the thing it is?\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

e SOCRATES: Now when someone's thought does that, isn't it necessary that it should be thinking either both the things or one of them?

THEAETETUS: Yes, either both at once or in succession.\*

SOCRATES: Excellent. And do you apply the word 'thinking' to the same thing as I do?

THEAETETUS: What do you apply it to?

SOCRATES: Speech which the mind itself goes through with itself about whatever it's considering. Mind you, I don't claim to know the truth of what I'm telling you. It looks to me as if, when the mind is thinking, it's simply carrying on

a discussion, asking itself questions and answering them, 190a  
and making assertions and denials. And when it has come to  
a decision, either slowly or in a sudden rush, and it's no  
longer divided, but says one single thing, we call that its  
judgement. So what I call 'judging' is speaking, and what I  
call 'judgement' is speech; but speech spoken, not aloud to  
someone else, but silently to oneself.\* What do you think?

THEAETETUS: I agree.

SOCRATES: So whenever someone judges that one of two  
things is the other, he's actually saying to himself, appar-  
ently, that the one is the other.

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

b

SOCRATES: Well now, try to remember if you've ever said to  
yourself that beautiful is certainly ugly, or that unjust is  
just. Or, to put it generally, ask yourself whether you've  
ever set out to persuade yourself that one of two things is  
certainly the other, or—quite the contrary—you've never,  
even in your sleep, had the face to say to yourself that odd is  
in fact even, or anything else of that kind.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's true.

SOCRATES: And do you think anyone else, sane or mad, has had c  
the face to say to himself in all seriousness, trying to persuade  
himself of it, that ox is necessarily horse, or two one?\*

THEAETETUS: Good heavens, no.

SOCRATES: Well then, if speaking to oneself is judging, then  
no one who has both things in what he says and judges, and  
has a grasp of both in his mind, would say and judge that  
what's different is different. This time it's you who must let  
the expression pass.\* I mean it like this: no one judges that  
ugly is beautiful, or anything else of that kind.

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THEAETETUS: I'll let it pass, Socrates. And I think it's as  
you say.

SOCRATES: So if one has both things in one's judgement, it's  
impossible that one should judge that one of them is the  
other.

THEAETETUS: Apparently.



SOCRATES: But if one has only one of the two in one's judgement, and the other one not at all, one will never judge that one of them is the other.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's true; because one would otherwise be obliged to have a grasp of something which one didn't even have in one's judgement.

SOCRATES: So there's no room for other-judging, whether one  
e has both things in one's judgement or only one of them.\* It follows that if one were to define false judgement as being different-judging,\* one would be talking nonsense; because it isn't made clear that there is false judgement in us if we take this line, any more than it was on the lines we followed before.

THEAETETUS: Evidently not.

SOCRATES: And yet, Theaetetus, if it isn't made clear that there is such a thing, we'll be forced to make many strange admissions.

THEAETETUS: What sort of admissions?

SOCRATES: I shan't tell you until I've tried looking at it from every angle. Because I'd be ashamed of us if we were forced to  
191a make the sort of admissions I'm talking about while we were in difficulties. But if we find what we're after and free ourselves, that will be the time for us to talk about how others suffer that fate—when our own standpoint is free of absurdity. If we can't find any way out of our difficulty, then I suppose we'll be humbled, and submit to the argument like seasick passengers, letting it trample on us and treat us as it likes.

Well now, let me tell you where I can still see a way out for our inquiry.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, do.

SOCRATES: I'll say we were wrong when we agreed that it's impossible to get into falsehood by judging that things one knows are things one doesn't know.\* On the contrary,  
b there's a way in which it's possible.

THEAETETUS: Do you mean the point I was suspicious about, too, when we were saying that that's impossible? The point

I mean is that sometimes I, who know Socrates, see someone else whom I don't know, some distance away, and think he's Socrates, whom I know; because the sort of thing you mentioned does happen in a case of that kind.\*

SOCRATES: And we kept off it because it made us not know things we know, even though we know them?

THEAETETUS: Exactly.

SOCRATES: Well, let's put it, not like that, but in the following way. Perhaps the difficulty will give way to us at some point, and perhaps it'll hold out; but we're in such trouble that we must turn every argument over and test it. Well now, look and see if there's anything in this. Is it possible for someone who didn't know something earlier to come to know it later?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And another thing, and yet another?

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Well then, let me ask you to suppose, for the sake of argument, that there's an imprint-receiving piece of wax in our minds: bigger in some, smaller in others; of cleaner wax in some, of dirtier in others; of harder wax in some, of softer in others, but in some made of wax of a proper consistency.\*

THEAETETUS: All right.

SOCRATES: And let's say it's the gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses; and that if there's anything we want to remember, among the things we see, hear, or ourselves conceive, we hold it under the perceptions and conceptions and imprint them on it, as if we were taking the impressions of signet rings. Whatever is imprinted, we remember and know, as long as its image is present; but whatever is smudged out or proves unable to be imprinted, we've forgotten and don't know.

THEAETETUS: Very well, let's assume that's so.

SOCRATES: Well now, suppose someone knows those things and is thinking about one of the things he sees or hears. See if he might possibly make a false judgement in some such way as this.

THEAETETUS: What?

SOCRATES: On some occasions by thinking that things he knows are things he knows, and on some occasions by thinking they're things he doesn't know. Because when we agreed, in our earlier discussion, that these cases were impossible, we were wrong.\*

THEAETETUS: And what do you say now?

192a SOCRATES: What ought to be said about them is as follows.

- We should begin by making distinctions. It's impossible to think that something one knows, having a memory-trace of it in one's mind, but doesn't perceive, is something else which one knows, having a trace of it, too, but not perceiving it; or again, that something one knows is something one doesn't know and doesn't have an imprint of; or that something one doesn't know is something else one doesn't know; or that something one doesn't know is something one knows; or, with something one perceives, to think that it's something else one perceives; or that something one perceives is something one doesn't perceive; or that something one doesn't perceive is something else one doesn't perceive; or that something one doesn't perceive is something one perceives. Moreover, to think that something one knows and perceives, having the imprint matched to the perception, is something else one knows and perceives, having the imprint of it, again, matched to the perception, is still more impossible than those former cases, if that's possible. It's impossible, too, to think that something one knows and perceives, having the memory-trace in correct order, is something one knows; or that something one knows and perceives, having the memory-trace in order, as before, is something one perceives; or that something one doesn't know and doesn't perceive is something one doesn't know and doesn't perceive; or that something one doesn't know and doesn't perceive is something one doesn't know; or that something one doesn't know and doesn't perceive is something one doesn't perceive. It's utterly impossible that anyone should judge something false in any of these cases. So we're left with the

following cases in which that sort of thing happens, if it happens anywhere at all.

THEAETETUS: What cases? Perhaps I'll understand a bit more from them; because at the moment I don't follow.\*

SOCRATES: In the case of things one knows, one can think that they're other things which one knows and perceives, or that they're things one doesn't know, but perceives; or one can think that things one knows and perceives are other things one knows and perceives. d

THEAETETUS: Now I'm much further behind than I was before.

SOCRATES: Well then, listen, and I'll explain again. I know Theodorus, and remember, in myself, what he's like, and similarly with Theaetetus. Now sometimes I see you, sometimes not; sometimes I touch you, sometimes not; sometimes I hear you, or perceive you in some other way, and sometimes I have no perception relating to you. But none the less I remember you and know you in myself, don't I?\*

THEAETETUS: Certainly. e

SOCRATES: Well now, you must understand that this is the first point I want to make clear to you: it's possible not to perceive things one knows, and it's possible to perceive them.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's true.

SOCRATES: And things one doesn't know, too: it's possible that on some occasions one doesn't perceive them either, and that on some occasions one does perceive them, but only that?

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's true too.

SOCRATES: Well then, see if you follow a bit better now. Suppose Socrates knows Theodorus and Theaetetus, but sees neither, and has no other perception relating to them. In that case, he couldn't ever judge, in himself, that Theaetetus is Theodorus. Is there anything in what I'm saying? 193a

THEAETETUS: Yes, it's true.

SOCRATES: Well, that was the first of those cases I was describing.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, it was.

SOCRATES: And the second was that if I know one of you but don't know the other, and perceive neither, then, again, I couldn't ever think that the one I know is the one I don't know.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's right.

- b SOCRATES: And the third was that if I know neither and perceive neither, I couldn't think that one, whom I don't know, is another, whom I don't know. And imagine you've heard, all over again, the whole series of cases I described before, in which I'll never judge what's false about you and Theodorus, whether I know both, or am ignorant of both, or know one but not the other; and correspondingly with perceptions, if you follow.

THEAETETUS: Yes, I do.

- SOCRATES: Well then, we're left with the possibility of judging what's false in the following case. I know you and Theodorus, and have imprints of the two of you on that piece of wax,
- c like those of signet rings. I see you both, some way off and not properly, and I'm eager to assign the imprint which belongs to each to the seeing which belongs to each, and to insert and fit the seeing into its own trace, so that recognition may take place. But, missing that aim, and making a transposition, I attach the seeing of each one to the imprint which belongs to the other, like people who put their shoes on the wrong feet; or alternatively my going wrong is because the same sort of thing happens to me as happens to sight in mirrors, when it flows in such a way as to transpose left and
- d right. It's then that different-judging and the making of false judgements occur.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, Socrates, that seems plausible. You've given an extraordinarily good account of what happens to judgement.

SOCRATES: And besides, it also happens when I know both, and perceive one as well as knowing him, but not the other, but I don't have my knowledge of the first one matched to my perception. I put it like that in my earlier exposition, and you didn't understand me then.

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: What I was saying was that if one knows and perceives one of them, and has one's knowledge of him matched to one's perception, one will never think he's another person whom one knows and perceives, having one's knowledge of the second person, too, matched to one's perception of him. Wasn't that it?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And that left, I think, the case I've just described, in which we say that false judgement does take place: the case in which one knows both, and sees both or has some other perception of both, but doesn't have each imprint matched to its own perception; on the contrary, like a bad archer, one shoots wide of the mark and misses—an expression which is, in fact, applied to falsehood. 194a

THEAETETUS: Yes, and it's a natural one.

SOCRATES: Also, when there's a perception present for one of the imprints but not the other, and one's thought fits to the present perception the imprint which belongs to the absent one—in all those cases it gets into falsehood.

To sum up: about things one doesn't know and has never perceived, there isn't, apparently, any possibility of getting into falsehood, or of false judgement—not if there's anything sound in what we're saying now. It's precisely in the case of things we both know and perceive that judgement is twisted and turned about, coming to be false as well as true: true when it brings together the correct stamps and imprints, directly and in straight lines, and false when it brings them together obliquely and crosswise.\*

THEAETETUS: Well, isn't that an admirable account, Socrates?

SOCRATES: You'll be even more inclined to say so when you've heard what I'm going to say next. To make a true judgement is an admirable thing, and to get into falsehood is dishonourable.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well now, they say that those things come into being as follows. When the wax in someone's mind is thick,

- copious, smooth, and worked to a proper consistency, then, when the things which come through the senses are imprinted on that tablet of the heart, as Homer calls it,\* in an obscure allusion to its similarity to wax, the imprints which come into
- d being in those people and under those conditions are clean, and adequately deep, and they last a long time. To begin with, people of that sort are good learners; secondly, they have good memories; and third, they don't transpose their imprints with respect to their perceptions, but make true judgements. Because, since their imprints are clear and well spaced, they're quick to allot each set of things to the imprints that belong to them; these are called things which are, and those people are called wise. Don't you think that's right?

THEAETETUS: Absolutely.

- e SOCRATES: But what about when someone's heart is shaggy—a thing which the poet, in his great wisdom, saw fit to praise—or when it's dirty and made of wax that isn't pure, or excessively fluid or hard? Well, those in whom it's fluid prove good learners, but forgetful, and those in whom it's hard, the opposite. Those who have one that's shaggy and rough, a stony thing, full of earth or dirt mixed into it, have their imprints unclear. And they're unclear in those who have hard ones, too; because there's no depth in them. They're
- 195a unclear in those who have fluid ones, too; because, as a result of running together, they soon become blurred. And if, besides all that, the imprints have fallen on top of one another because of lack of space—if someone has a tiny little mind—then they're still more unclear than in those others. So all those people are of the right kind to make false judgements. Because when they see, hear, or conceive something, they're unable to allot each set quickly to their imprints; they're slow, and by allotting things where they don't belong, they mis-see, mis-hear, and misconceive most things. Those people, for their part, are said to have got into a state of falsehood about the things which are, and they're called stupid.\*
- b THEAETETUS: You're absolutely right, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So we should say, should we, that there are such things as false judgements in us?

THEAETETUS: Definitely.

SOCRATES: And true ones, too?

THEAETETUS: Yes, true ones, too.

SOCRATES: Well then, do we think we've now reached a satisfactory agreement that there certainly are both these kinds of judgement?

THEAETETUS: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: Theaetetus, what a really terrible, unpleasant thing a garrulous man does seem to be!

THEAETETUS: What? What are you getting at?

SOCRATES: I'm annoyed at my own stupidity and garrulousness: that's really what it is. After all, what other word could one use, when someone keeps dragging arguments up and down, because his dullness makes him unable to be convinced—when it's hard to get him to drop any argument?

THEAETETUS: But what is it that you're annoyed with?

SOCRATES: I'm not only annoyed; I'm afraid about what I'll answer if someone puts this question to me: 'So you've discovered false judgement, Socrates? You've found that it's located, not in our perceptions in relation to one another, and not in our thoughts in relation to one another, but in the connecting of a perception with a thought?' I suppose I'll say 'Yes', and give myself airs, as if we've discovered something admirable.\*

THEAETETUS: Well, Socrates, there doesn't seem to me to be anything dishonourable about what you've just shown.

SOCRATES: 'And you say', he'll go on, 'that we couldn't ever think that man—something we only have in our thoughts, but don't see—is horse, which, again, we don't see or touch, but only have in our thoughts, and don't have any other perception relating to it?' I suppose I'll say I do.

THEAETETUS: Yes, and quite rightly.

SOCRATES: 'Well now,' he'll say, 'doesn't it follow from what you've said that one couldn't ever think that eleven, which



one only has in one's thoughts, is twelve, which, again, one only has in one's thoughts?''\* Come on, you answer.

THEAETETUS: Well, I'll answer that if one saw or touched them, one might think eleven things were twelve, but one couldn't ever make that judgement about those which one has in one's thoughts.

196a SOCRATES: But look here, don't you think anyone has ever set five and seven before himself for consideration? I mean, not five men and seven men, or anything like that, but five and seven themselves, which we say are memory traces on the imprint-receiving tablet, and among which we say it isn't possible to make false judgements. What I'm asking is whether anyone has ever investigated just those things, talking to himself and asking himself how many, exactly, they are; and whether it has ever happened that one person thought and said that they're eleven and another that they're twelve. Or does everybody say and think that they're twelve?

b THEAETETUS: Good heavens, no; there are plenty of people who say they're eleven. And if one considers a problem involving a larger number, one will find there's more slipping up. I assume you're talking about numbers in general.

SOCRATES: Yes, you're right. Now ask yourself this: isn't what happens on those occasions precisely that one thinks twelve itself—the one on the imprint-receiving tablet—is eleven?

THEAETETUS: Apparently.\*

SOCRATES: Well then, have we come back to our first argument again? Because someone to whom that happens thinks something he knows is something else he knows. We said that that's impossible; and it was precisely on that ground that we forced through the conclusion that there's no such thing as false  
c judgement, in order not to have the same man forced both to know and not to know the same things at the same time.\*

THEAETETUS: That's quite true.

SOCRATES: Then we must represent the making of false judgements as something other than the transposing of thought in relation to perception.\* Because if it were that, then we

couldn't ever get into falsehood in the case of the things we have in our thoughts, themselves.

And as things are, either there's no such thing as false judgement, or it's possible not to know things one knows. Which of those do you choose?

THEAETETUS: It's an impossible choice that you're posing, Socrates.\*

SOCRATES: But it looks as if the argument won't let both be dropped. All the same, we must stick at nothing. What about trying some unscrupulous behaviour?

THEAETETUS: How?

SOCRATES: By being prepared to say what knowing is like.

THEAETETUS: What's unscrupulous about that?

SOCRATES: You seem not to be bearing in mind that our whole discussion, from the beginning, has been a search after knowledge, on the assumption that we don't know what it is.

THEAETETUS: No, I'm bearing it in mind.

SOCRATES: In that case, doesn't it seem shameless to make pronouncements about what knowing is like, when we don't know knowledge?\* But in fact, Theaetetus, we've been infected, for a long time, with an impure way of carrying on our discussion. Countless times we've said 'we know', 'we don't know', 'we have knowledge', 'we don't have knowledge', as if we could understand each other at all, while we're still ignorant of knowledge. Even at this very moment, if you don't mind, we've used 'be ignorant' and 'understand' again, as if it were proper for us to use them when we're bereft of knowledge.

THEAETETUS: But, Socrates, how are you going to carry on the discussion, if you keep off those words?

SOCRATES: Since I'm what I am, I'm not going to, though I would if I were a logic-chopper.\* If a gentleman of that kind were here now, he'd have professed to keep off those words, and he'd tell us off emphatically for what I'm saying. Well now, since we're not clever people, would you like me to overcome my scruples and say what knowing is like? Because it seems to me that it might prove helpful.

THEAETETUS: Yes, please do. And if you don't keep off those words, it won't be held against you at all.

SOCRATES: Well then, have you heard what people nowadays say knowing is?

THEAETETUS: I may have, but at the moment I don't remember.

b SOCRATES: They say it's the having of knowledge, I think.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's true.

SOCRATES: Well now, let's make a small alteration and say possession of knowledge.\*

THEAETETUS: How are you going to say the two differ?

SOCRATES: Perhaps not at all; but listen to what I think, and help me test it.

THEAETETUS: All right, if I can.

SOCRATES: Well, having doesn't seem to me to be the same as possessing. For instance, if someone has bought a coat, and owns it, but isn't wearing it, we'd say he doesn't have it but does possess it.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, that would be right.

c SOCRATES: Well now, ask yourself whether knowledge, too, is something which it's possible, in that way, to possess but not have; just as, if someone has caught some wild birds, pigeons or some other kind, and constructed an aviary at his house, where he looks after them, we'd say that in one sense he has them all the time, because he possesses them—isn't that right?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But that in another sense he doesn't have any of them, but what he has acquired, with respect to them, now that he has made them subject to him in an enclosure of his own, is power: power to get hold of them and have them  
d whenever he likes, by catching whichever one he wants, and to let them go again; and it's open to him to do that as often as he thinks fit.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, just as, previously, we constructed a sort of moulded lump of wax in our minds, let's now make, in every mind, a sort of aviary for birds of every kind:\* some in

flocks, apart from the others, some in groups of a few, and some alone, flying about just anywhere among them all.\*

THEAETETUS: All right. But what next?

e

SOCRATES: We must say that when we're children this receptacle is empty, and in place of the birds, we must think of pieces of knowledge.\* Whatever piece of knowledge someone comes to possess and shuts up in his enclosure, we must say he has come to know or discovered the thing of which that's the knowledge; and that that's what knowing is.

THEAETETUS: All right, let's assume that that's so.

SOCRATES: Well now, ask yourself what names are needed for catching, again, any piece of knowledge one wants, and having it once one has got hold of it, and letting it go again: the same names as for when one first came to possess them, or different ones? You'll understand what I mean more clearly if I start from this point. You say there's such a thing as an art of arithmetic?

198a

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, you must think of it as a hunt for pieces of knowledge of everything odd and even.

THEAETETUS: Very well.

SOCRATES: It's by this art, I imagine, that one has subject to oneself pieces of knowledge of the numbers, and that those who pass them on to others do so.

b

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: If someone passes them on, we call it teaching, and if someone receives them, we call it learning. And if someone has them, by possessing them in that aviary, we call it knowing.\*

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Pay attention, now, to this next point. If someone is completely versed in arithmetic, he knows all numbers, doesn't he? Because there are pieces of knowledge of all numbers in his mind.

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Well now, a person of that kind might sometimes do some counting: either numbers themselves, to himself, or something else, some external thing that has a number?

c

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: And we'll take counting to be nothing but investigating how large some number is.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So it's evident that he's investigating something he knows as if he didn't know it, this man who, we've agreed, knows every number. I dare say you sometimes hear puzzles on those lines.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes.

- d SOCRATES: Well, we'll use our comparison with possessing and catching pigeons, and say that there are two kinds of catching: one before one has come to possess a thing, in order to get possession of it, and the other when one possesses it, in order to get hold of what one has possessed for some time and have it in one's hands. On those lines, even if one came to know things some time ago, and since then there have been pieces of knowledge of them in one and one has known them, it's still possible that one should come to know those same things again, by once more getting hold of and having the knowledge of each, which one has possessed for some time but not had readily available to one's thoughts. Is that right?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

- e SOCRATES: Well now, what I was asking just now was how we ought to use our words in order to talk about those cases in which an arithmetician sets out to count or a literate person sets out to read something. Should we say that in a case of that sort someone who knows things sets out to learn again, from himself, the things he knows?

THEAETETUS: No, that would be an odd thing to say, Socrates.

- 199a SOCRATES: Well, should we say he's going to read, or count, things he doesn't know, when we've granted that he does know all the letters, or every number?

THEAETETUS: No, that would be unreasonable too.

SOCRATES: Well then, would you like us to say this? As far as the words are concerned, we don't mind at all about how anyone may enjoy dragging 'know' and 'learn' about. But now that

we've distinguished possessing knowledge as one thing and having it as another, we say that it's impossible not to possess what one possesses, so that it never turns out that someone doesn't know what he knows; but that all the same it is possible to get hold of a false judgement about it. Because it's possible not to have one's knowledge of that thing, but to have some other piece of knowledge instead of it. That happens when, in trying to catch some piece of knowledge or other, among those that are flying about, one misses, and gets hold of the one instead of the other. It's then that one thinks eleven is twelve, having got hold of the knowledge of eleven that's in one, instead of the knowledge of twelve, as one might get hold of a dove instead of a pigeon.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's reasonable.

SOCRATES: But when one gets hold of the piece of knowledge one is trying to get hold of, on those occasions one is free from falsehood and has in one's judgements the things which are. On these lines, there are both true and false judgements, and none of the things we were finding annoying before gets in our way. Perhaps you'll agree with me, or won't you?

THEAETETUS: Yes, I agree.

SOCRATES: Yes, because we've got rid of people's failing to know what they know; because in no case, now, does it turn out that we don't possess what we possess, whether we're involved in falsehood about something or not.

But it seems to me that another, even stranger occurrence is coming into view.

THEAETETUS: What?

SOCRATES: That an interchange of pieces of knowledge should ever turn out to be a false judgement.

THEAETETUS: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: First of all, that someone who has knowledge of something should be ignorant of that very thing, not through ignorance but because of his own knowledge; and second, that he should judge that thing to be something else, and the

something else to be that thing—surely it's very unreasonable? That, when knowledge has come to be present in it, the mind should know nothing, and be ignorant of everything? Because according to that argument, there's nothing to stop even ignorance making one know something, or blindness making one see, if even knowledge can sometimes make one ignorant.\*

- e THEAETETUS: Yes, Socrates, perhaps we were wrong to make our birds pieces of knowledge only; perhaps we ought to have also imagined pieces of unknowing flying about in the mind with them. When one tries to catch them, one sometimes gets hold of a piece of knowledge and sometimes of a piece of unknowing about the same thing; and one makes a false judgement because of the piece of unknowing, and a true one because of the piece of knowledge.\*

SOCRATES: It isn't easy to avoid praising you, Theaetetus; but think again about what you've said. Let's assume it's as you say. Then someone who has got hold of the piece of unknowing

200a will, you say, make a false judgement. Is that right?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But of course he won't actually believe he's making a false judgement.

THEAETETUS: Of course not.

SOCRATES: On the contrary, he'll believe he's making a true judgement. His attitude, with regard to the things he has got into falsehood about, will be the same as if he knew them.

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: So he'll think that what he has caught, and has, is a piece of knowledge, not a piece of unknowing.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's clear.

SOCRATES: Well then, we've come a long way round, and now we're back at our first difficulty again. Because that expert in refutation will laugh, and say:

- b 'You excellent people! Is it that someone knows both a piece of knowledge and a piece of unknowing, and thinks something he knows is another of the things he knows? Or that he knows

neither, and judges that something he doesn't know is another of the things he doesn't know? Or that he knows one and not the other, and judges that something he knows is something he doesn't know, or believes that something he doesn't know is something he knows? Or are you going to start all over again and tell me that there are yet more pieces of knowledge of those pieces of knowledge and unknowing, which their possessor has shut up in yet more ridiculous aviaries or moulded lumps of wax, and which he knows as long as he possesses them, even if he doesn't have them readily available in his mind? Are you going to let yourselves be forced, in that way, to keep coming round, time after time, to the same point, without making any progress? c

How shall we answer that, Theaetetus?

THEAETETUS: Good heavens, Socrates, I don't know what we should say.

SOCRATES: Well then, is the argument right to tell us off, and does it show that we were wrong to leave knowledge on one side and look for false judgement first? The fact is that d it's impossible to get to know it until one has acquired an adequate grasp of what, exactly, knowledge is.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, Socrates, as things are, I'm obliged to think it's as you say.

SOCRATES: Well then, let's start again from the beginning: what should one say knowledge is? Because we're presumably not going to give up yet.

THEAETETUS: No, not unless you do.

SOCRATES: Tell me, then, what can we say it is with the least risk of contradicting ourselves?

THEAETETUS: What we were trying before, Socrates; because e I haven't got anything else to suggest.

SOCRATES: And what was that?

THEAETETUS: That true judgement is knowledge. Making a true judgement is, at any rate, something free of mistakes, and everything that results from it is admirable and good.\*



SOCRATES: Well, Theaetetus, the man who was leading the way across the river said, apparently, 'It will show for itself.'

201a The same goes for this: if we go on and search into it, perhaps the very thing we're looking for will come to light at our feet, but if we stay put, nothing will come clear to us.

THEAETETUS: Yes, you're right; let's go on and look into it.

SOCRATES: Well, this point doesn't take much looking: because there's a whole art which shows you that that isn't what knowledge is.

THEAETETUS: How do you mean? What art?

SOCRATES: The art of those who are greatest of all in point of wisdom: people call them speech-makers and litigants. Because those people, you see, persuade others by means of their art, not teaching them, but making them judge whatever they want them to judge. Or do you think there are people who are so clever as teachers that, in the short time  
b allowed by the clock, they can teach the truth, about what happened, to people who weren't there when some others were being robbed of money or otherwise violently treated?†

THEAETETUS: No, I don't think so at all. What they can do is persuade.

SOCRATES: And you say persuading is making someone judge something?\*

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: So when jurymen have been persuaded, in accordance with justice, about things which it's possible to know only if one has seen them and not otherwise, then, in deciding  
c those matters by hearsay, and getting hold of a true judgement, they have decided without knowledge; though what they have been persuaded of is correct, given that they have reached a good verdict. Is that right?

THEAETETUS: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: But if true judgement and knowledge were the same thing, then even the best of jurymen would never make correct judgements without knowledge; and, as things are, it seems that the two are different.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, Socrates, there's something I once heard someone saying, which I'd forgotten, but it's coming back to me now. He said that true judgement with an account is knowledge, and the kind without an account falls outside the sphere of knowledge. Things of which there's no account are not knowable, he said—he actually called them that—whereas things which have an account are knowable.\*

SOCRATES: Good. But tell me how he made that distinction between things which are knowable and things which aren't: let's see if what you've heard matches what I have.

THEAETETUS: I don't know if I'll be able to work it out; but I think I'd follow if someone else stated it.

SOCRATES: Listen, then: here's my dream in return for yours.\* In my dream, I seemed to hear some people saying that the primary elements, as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account. Each of them itself, by itself, can only be named, and one can't go on to say anything else, neither that it is nor that it isn't; because in that case, one would be attaching being or not being to it, whereas one oughtn't to add anything if one is going to express in an account that thing, itself, alone. In fact one shouldn't even add itself, or that, or each, or alone, or this, or any of several other things of that kind; because those things run about and get added to everything, being different from the things they're attached to, whereas if the thing itself could be expressed in an account and had an account proper to itself, it would have to be expressed apart from everything else. As things are, it's impossible that any of the primary things should be expressed in an account; because the only thing that's possible for it is to be named, because a name is the only thing it has. But as for the things composed of them, just as the things themselves are woven together, so their names, woven together, come to be an account; because a weaving together of names is the being of an account.\* In that way, the elements have no account and are unknowable, but they're perceivable; and the complexes are knowable and expressible in an account and judgeable in a true judgement.\* Now when

- c someone gets hold of the true judgement of something without an account, his mind is in a state of truth about it but doesn't know it; because someone who can't give and receive an account of something isn't knowledgeable about that thing. But if he gets hold of an account as well, then it's possible not only for all that to happen, but also for him to be in a perfect condition in respect of knowledge.\*

Is that the way you heard the dream, or was yours different?

THEAETETUS: No, it was exactly like that.

SOCRATES: And are you satisfied with it? Are you prepared to lay it down, on those lines, that true judgement with an account is knowledge?

THEAETETUS: Yes, definitely.

- d SOCRATES: Can it be, Theaetetus, that just like that, in this one day, we've got hold of something which many wise men have been looking for for a long time, and grown old before they found it?

THEAETETUS: Well, Socrates, it certainly seems to me that the account we've just given is an admirable one.

SOCRATES: Yes, actually it does seem plausible that the definition itself is correct: because what knowledge could there be without an account and a correct judgement?

However, there's one thing in what we've said which I find unsatisfactory.

THEAETETUS: What's that?

- e SOCRATES: What actually seems to be its most subtle point, namely that the elements are unknowable but the class of complexes knowable.\*

THEAETETUS: Isn't that right?

SOCRATES: We must find out; because we have, as hostages for the theory, so to speak, the models which it used in saying all those things.

THEAETETUS: What are they?

SOCRATES: Elements and complexes of letters.\* Or do you

think the person who made the statements we're talking about had something else in view when he made them?

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: Well then, let's take them up and put them to the test, or rather, let's put ourselves to the test, to see if we learnt letters in that way or not. Tell me, first of all: is it the case that syllables have an account but letters don't?

THEAETETUS: I suppose it may be.

SOCRATES: Yes, that's exactly what I think, too. Because suppose someone put this question, about the first syllable of 'Socrates': 'Tell me, Theaetetus, what is "SO"?' What will you answer?

THEAETETUS: That it's 'S' and 'O'.

SOCRATES: And there you have an account of the syllable?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Go on, then, tell me the account of 'S', in the same way.

THEAETETUS: But how could one express in an account the elements of an element? In fact, Socrates, 'S' is one of the unvoiced consonants, only a noise, which occurs when the tongue hisses, as it were. 'B', moreover, has neither voice nor noise, and neither do most of the letters. So it's quite right to say that they have no accounts, when the very clearest of them, the seven vowels themselves, have only voice, but no account whatever.\*

SOCRATES: So this point in our treatment of knowledge is one that we've correctly established.

THEAETETUS: Evidently.

SOCRATES: But have we shown that a letter isn't knowable but a syllable is?

THEAETETUS: Well, it seems plausible.

SOCRATES: Well now, look here: do we say that a syllable is both its letters, or all of them if there are more than two? Or that it's some one kind of thing which has come into being when they're put together?\*

THEAETETUS: All the letters, I should think.

SOCRATES: Well now, consider a case where there are two, 'S'

and 'O'. The two of them are the first syllable of my name.

If someone knows it, he knows the two of them, doesn't he?

d THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: So he knows 'S' and 'O'.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But can it be that he's ignorant of each one, and knows the two of them without knowing either?\*

THEAETETUS: No, that would be strange and unreasonable, Socrates.

SOCRATES: But if it's necessary to know each one in order to know the two of them, then it's absolutely necessary that anyone who is ever going to know a syllable should first know its letters. And on those lines, our admirable theory will take to its heels and disappear.

e THEAETETUS: That's very sudden.

SOCRATES: Yes, it's because we aren't keeping a proper watch on it. Perhaps we ought to have laid it down that a syllable is, not the letters, but some one kind of thing which has come into being out of them: something which has one form of its own, and is different from the letters.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, indeed: perhaps that's nearer the truth than the first alternative.

SOCRATES: We'd better look into it, and not betray a great and imposing theory in that unmanly way.

THEAETETUS: No.

204a SOCRATES: Well then, let's suppose it's as we're saying now: a complex is one kind of thing which comes into being out of each set of elements that fit together, and that goes for letters and everything else alike.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: In that case, it mustn't have parts.

THEAETETUS: Why not?

SOCRATES: Because with anything which has parts, it's necessarily the case that the whole is all the parts. Or do you say that a whole, too, is some one kind of thing which has come into being out of the parts and is different from all the parts?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well then, do you call a sum and a whole the same thing, or two different things? b

THEAETETUS: I'm not at all clear, but because you keep telling me to answer readily, I'll take a risk and say they're different.\*

SOCRATES: Your readiness is correct, Theaetetus; but we must look and see if your answer is.

THEAETETUS: Yes, we must.

SOCRATES: Well now, according to what you've just said, a whole would be different from a sum?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And what about this: is a sum at all different from all the things? For instance, when we say 'one, two three, four, five, six', or 'twice three', or 'three times two', or 'four plus two', or 'three plus two plus one', are we talking about the same thing in all these cases, or something different? c

THEAETETUS: The same thing.

SOCRATES: Namely six?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now in each utterance we've spoken of six in all?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And is there no sum that we speak of when we speak of all of them?

THEAETETUS: There must be one.

SOCRATES: Namely the six?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So in the case of anything which consists of a number of things, it's the same thing that we're referring to when we speak of the sum and when we speak of all the things?

THEAETETUS: Evidently.

SOCRATES: So let's speak about them in the following way. The number in an acre and the acre are the same thing, aren't they?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And similarly with the number in a mile.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And the same goes for the number in an army and the army, and everything of that kind? Because in each case the number, in sum, is what the thing, in sum, is.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

e SOCRATES: But the number of things, in each case, is nothing but parts?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So anything that has parts would seem to consist of parts?

THEAETETUS: Evidently.

SOCRATES: And we've agreed that all the parts are the sum, given that the number, in sum, is to be the sum.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So the whole doesn't consist of parts. Because if it were all the parts, it would be the sum.

THEAETETUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: But is there anything else that a part is a part of, other than a whole?

THEAETETUS: Yes, a sum.

205a SOCRATES: You're putting up a brave fight, Theaetetus. But isn't a sum precisely what you have when there's nothing missing?

THEAETETUS: Yes, that must be so.

SOCRATES: And won't a whole be that same thing: that from which nothing at all is missing? If a thing has something missing from it, it's neither a whole nor a sum. Losing something makes it move, at the same time, from one and the same initial state to one and the same resulting state.

THEAETETUS: It seems to me now that there's no difference between a sum and a whole.\*

SOCRATES: And we've been saying that if something has parts, the whole, and the sum, will be all the parts?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

b SOCRATES: Well then, let's go back to what I was trying to say just now.\* If it's not the case that a complex is its elements, then isn't it necessarily the case that it doesn't have the

elements as parts: alternatively, if it's the same as them, then it's no more or less knowable than they are?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And it was in order to avoid this latter situation that we laid it down that it's different from them?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But if it's not the elements that are parts of a complex, can you tell us any other things which are parts of a complex, but not elements of it?

THEAETETUS: Certainly not. If I conceded that it had any parts, Socrates, it would surely be absurd to leave its elements on one side and resort to something else.

SOCRATES: So according to what you're saying now, c Theaetetus, a complex would be some absolutely single kind of thing, not divisible into parts.

THEAETETUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: Now you remember that a short time ago we were accepting something which we thought was a good thing to say: namely that there is no account of the primary things of which everything else is composed, because each of them itself, by itself, is, as we said, *incomposite*,\* and it isn't correct to add to it, not even by saying 'is' about it, or 'this', since that would be to mention things different from it and not proper to it; and it's that reason, we said, that makes it lack an account and be unknowable. Do you remember?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And wasn't the reason precisely its being single in d form and not divisible into parts?† Because I can't see any other.

THEAETETUS: No, there doesn't seem to be any other.

SOCRATES: And now the complex has fallen into the same class as the element, given that it doesn't have parts and is a single kind of thing?

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's quite true.

SOCRATES: So if, on the one hand, the complex is a plurality of elements and a whole, with them as its parts, then complexes



and elements are knowable and expressible in accounts to just the same extent, since it has turned out that all the parts are the same thing as the whole.

e THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: And if, on the other hand, it's a single thing without parts, then a complex and an element lack an account and are unknowable to just the same extent; because the same reason will make them so.

THEAETETUS: Yes, I can't deny it.

SOCRATES: So if anyone says that a complex is knowable and expressible in an account, and an element the opposite, let's not accept it.\*

THEAETETUS: No, not if we're convinced by this argument.

206a SOCRATES: Moreover, wouldn't you be more inclined to accept a statement of the opposite position, because of what you noticed in yourself, in the course of your learning of your letters?

THEAETETUS: What sort of thing?

SOCRATES: That when you were learning, you spent your time doing nothing but trying to tell the letters apart, each one just by itself, both when it was a matter of seeing them and when it was a matter of hearing them, in order that you wouldn't be confused by their being put into arrangements, whether spoken or written.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's quite true.

b SOCRATES: And at the music teacher's, to have learnt perfectly was nothing but being able to follow each note and say which sort of string it belonged to; and everyone would agree that notes are the elements of music?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So if we may argue from the elements and complexes that we're familiar with ourselves to the rest, we'll say that the class of elements admits of knowledge that is far clearer, and more important for the perfect grasp of every branch of learning, than the complex;\* and if anyone says that it's in the nature of a complex to be knowable and of an

element to be unknowable, we'll take him to be making a joke, whether on purpose or not.

THEAETETUS: Definitely.

SOCRATES: What's more, I think other proofs of that point c might well come to light.

But let's not, on their account, forget to look into the question before us: what, exactly, is meant by saying that an account, if added to a true judgement, becomes the most perfect of knowledge.

THEAETETUS: No, we must look into it.

SOCRATES: Well now, tell me, what, exactly, are we intended to take 'account' as signifying? It seems to me that it means one of three things.\*

THEAETETUS: What?

SOCRATES: The first would be making one's thought plain by d means of speech, with expressions and names: reflecting it in what flows through one's mouth, as if in a mirror or water. Or don't you think that sort of thing is an account?

THEAETETUS: No, I do. At any rate, we do say that someone who does that is giving an account of something.

SOCRATES: But on the other hand, that's something which anyone can do more or less quickly—I mean, indicating what he thinks about something—if he isn't deaf or dumb from birth. On those lines all those who make some correct e judgement will turn out to have it with an account, and there will no longer be any room for correct judgement to occur apart from knowledge.\*

THEAETETUS: That's true.

SOCRATES: But let's not lightly condemn him of talking nonsense—I mean the person who brought out the definition of knowledge that we're looking into now. Perhaps he didn't mean that; perhaps what he meant was being able, when one is asked what anything is, to provide the questioner 207a with an answer in terms of its elements.

THEAETETUS: What sort of thing do you mean, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Well, Hesiod, for example, says, about a wagon, 'A hundred are a wagon's timbers'. Now I wouldn't be able to put them in an account, and I don't suppose you would either. If we were asked what a wagon is, we'd be quite content if we could say 'Wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke'.\*

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Our man, though, might well think us absurd, just as if we'd been asked about your name and answered by  
 b syllables: we'd be correct in judging and saying what we did, but we'd be absurd if we thought that we were experts in letters and that we had and were stating the account of Theaetetus' name in the manner of experts in letters. The fact is that it's impossible, he'd think, to give an account of anything in a knowledgeable way until, as well as one's true judgement, one can go through each thing element by element. That's something that was actually said earlier in our discussion.

THEAETETUS: Yes, it was.

SOCRATES: Well now, in the same way, he'd think we have a correct judgement about a wagon, too; whereas someone  
 c who can go through its being by way of those hundred timbers has, in getting hold of that, got hold of an account in addition to his true judgement, and, instead of possessing judgement, has come to possess expertise and knowledge about a wagon's being,\* having gone through the whole thing element by element.

THEAETETUS: And don't you think that's a good suggestion, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Tell me if you do, and if you accept that to go through anything element by element is to give an account of it, whereas to go through it complex by complex or in some  
 d still larger units leaves it without an account. Then we can look into it.

THEAETETUS: Well, I do accept it.

SOCRATES: And do you do so in the belief that anyone has knowledge of anything when the same thing seems to him

sometimes to belong to one thing and sometimes to belong to another, or when he judges that the same thing sometimes has one thing belonging to it and sometimes another?

THEAETETUS: No, certainly not.

SOCRATES: Well, have you forgotten that in the course of your learning of your letters, at first, you and everyone else did just that?

THEAETETUS: You mean we believed that the same syllable sometimes had one letter belonging to it and sometimes another, and we put the same letter sometimes in the appropriate syllable and sometimes in another?

SOCRATES: Yes.

THEAETETUS: Well, I certainly haven't forgotten; and I don't think people in that condition have knowledge yet.

SOCRATES: Well now, when someone at that sort of stage is writing 'Theaetetus', and thinks he ought to write 'T', 'H', 'E', and does so; and then again, when setting out to write 'Theodorus', he thinks he ought to write 'T', 'E', and does so; shall we say he knows the first syllable of your names?\*

THEAETETUS: No, we've just agreed that someone in that condition doesn't have knowledge yet.

SOCRATES: And is there anything to stop the same person being in that condition with respect to the second syllable, too; and the third, and the fourth?

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: Well then, whenever, in those circumstances, he writes down 'Theaetetus', putting the letters in order, he'll be writing it in a condition in which he has the way to go through it element by element, together with a correct judgement?

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's clear.

SOCRATES: But in a condition in which he still doesn't have knowledge, though what he judges is correct: that's what we're saying?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And in a condition in which he does have an account

as well as a correct judgement. Because he was writing in a condition in which he has the way to go through it element by element, and we agreed that that's an account.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's true.

SOCRATES: So there's such a thing as correct judgement with an account which oughtn't yet to be called knowledge.\*

THEAETETUS: It looks as if there is.

SOCRATES: Then our wealth was apparently only a dream, when we thought we had the truest possible account of knowledge.

- c Or shouldn't we make that accusation yet? We said that there were three kinds of thing, one of which would be what our man meant by 'account'—I mean, the man who defines knowledge as being correct judgement with an account.\* Now perhaps someone will define it, not in the way we've just discussed, but as the last of the three.

THEAETETUS: You're right to remind us, because there's still one left. One was a sort of image of thought in speech, and one, which we've just discussed, was the way to go through the thing, element by element, till one has gone through the whole. Now what do you say the third is?

SOCRATES: What most people would say: being able to state some mark by which the thing one is asked for differs from everything else.\*

THEAETETUS: Can you give me an account of something as an example?

- d SOCRATES: Well, about the sun, if you like to take that as an example, I imagine you'll accept as adequate that it's the brightest of the heavenly bodies that go round the earth.

THEAETETUS: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Well, let me tell you why I said that. It was to bring out what we were saying just now: that if you get hold of the differentiation of anything, by which it differs from everything else, then some people say you'll have got hold of an account; whereas as long as you grasp something

common, your account will be about those things to which the common quality belongs.

THEAETETUS: I understand; and it seems to me that it's right e to call something of that sort an account.

SOCRATES: And anyone who, along with a correct judgement about any of the things which are, gets hold of its differentiation from everything else as well, will have come to have knowledge of that thing, of which he previously had a judgement.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's what we're saying.

SOCRATES: But now that I've got close to what we're saying, Theaetetus, as if it were a picture with shading,\* I simply can't understand it, not even a little; whereas, as long as I was standing some distance away, it seemed to me that there was something in it.

THEAETETUS: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: I'll tell you, if I can. Suppose I have a correct 209a judgement about you; then if I get hold of your account as well, I know you, and if not, I merely have you in my judgement.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: And an account was to be what gives expression to your differentness.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well then, when I was merely judging, wasn't it the case that I had no grasp in my thought of any of the things by which you're different from everything else?

THEAETETUS: Apparently not.

SOCRATES: So I had in my thought one of the common things, none of which you have to any greater extent than anyone else does.

THEAETETUS: Yes, that must be so. b

SOCRATES: But, for heaven's sake, in such conditions how on earth could it be you that I had in my judgement any more than anyone else?\* Suppose my thought was that Theaetetus is the one who is a man, and has a nose, eyes, a mouth, and so

on with each part of the body. Now, could that thought make it Theaetetus that I have in my thought, any more than Theodorus, or, as one might say, the remotest peasant in Asia?

THEAETETUS: No, how could it?

SOCRATES: And if I have in my thought not merely the one who  
c has a nose and eyes, but the one with a snub nose and prominent eyes, it still won't be you that I have in my judgement any more than myself or anyone else who is like that, will it?

THEAETETUS: No.

SOCRATES: In fact it won't, I think, be Theaetetus who figures in a judgement in me until precisely that snubness has imprinted and deposited in me a memory trace different from those of the other snubnesses I've seen, and similarly with the other things you're composed of. Then if I meet you tomorrow, that snubness will remind me and make me judge correctly about you.\*

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's quite true.

d SOCRATES: So correct judgement about anything, too, would seem to be about its differentness.

THEAETETUS: Evidently.

SOCRATES: Well then, what about getting hold of an account in addition to one's correct judgement: what's left for it to be? Because if, on the one hand, it means adding a judgement as to how the thing differs from everything else, the instructions turn out to be quite absurd.\*

THEAETETUS: In what way?

SOCRATES: When we already have a correct judgement as to how something differs from everything else, those instructions tell us to add a correct judgement as to how that same thing differs from everything else. On those  
e lines, 'the turning of a treadmill' would be nowhere near right as a description of them; they might more justly be called a case of a blind man telling one the way. Because telling us to add something we already have\* in order to get to know what we have in our judgements looks like the behaviour of someone who is well and truly in darkness.

THEAETETUS: And if, on the other hand . . . ? You put forward a hypothesis just now as if you were going to state another: what was it going to be?

SOCRATES: If, when it tells us to add an account, it's telling us to get to know, rather than judge, the differentness, then we'll have an amusing thing in this most admirable of our accounts of knowledge. Because to get to know is surely to get 210a hold of knowledge, isn't it?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So when it's asked what knowledge is, this account will apparently answer that it's correct judgement together with knowledge of differentness. Because that's what adding an account would be, according to it.

THEAETETUS: Apparently.

SOCRATES: And when we're investigating knowledge, it's absolutely silly to say it's correct judgement together with knowledge, whether of differentness or of anything else.\*

So it would seem, Theaetetus, that knowledge is neither perception, nor true judgement, nor an account added to b true judgement.

THEAETETUS: Apparently not.

SOCRATES: Well now, are we still pregnant and in labour with anything about knowledge, or have we given birth to everything?

THEAETETUS: Yes, indeed, Socrates; actually you've got me to say more than I had in me.

SOCRATES: And my art of midwifery tells us that they're all the results of false pregnancies and not worth bringing up?

THEAETETUS: Yes, definitely.

SOCRATES: Well then, if you try, later on, to conceive anything else, and do so, what you're pregnant with will be the c better for our present investigation. And if you stay barren, you'll be less burdensome to those who associate with you, and gentler, because you'll have the sense not to think you



know things which in fact you don't know.\* That much my art can do, but no more, and I don't know any of the things which others know, all the great and admirable men there are and have been; but this gift of midwifery my mother and  
d I received from God, she with women, and I with young and noble men and all who are beautiful.

Well, now I must go to the King's Porch to face the charge Meletus has brought against me. But let's meet here again, Theodorus, in the morning.\*

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

- 142a *Eucleides, Terpsion*: citizens of Megara (about twenty-six miles west of Athens); both were present at the death of Socrates as narrated in Plato's *Phaedo*. Eucleides (not to be confused with the mathematician Euclid) later founded the Megarian school of philosophy. Their conversation frames the main dialogue of the work, featuring Socrates, Theodorus, and Theaetetus.
- 142b *what he did in the battle*: Eucleides' narration makes it clear that Theaetetus (who will feature in the main dialogue as a youth of about 16) is on the point of death from dysentery and wounds sustained in a battle at Corinth. The date of the battle, and hence of the death of Theaetetus, is much disputed. Debra Nails (*The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis, 2002), s.v. 'Theaetetus') dates the battle and death in 391 BCE, when a Spartan force attacked Athens and her allies in Corinth. On this dating, Theaetetus died young, aged about 24. To fit a later tradition according to which Theaetetus worked as a mathematician in Plato's Academy, other scholars date the battle and death much later, to 369 BCE, when Theaetetus would have been 46, perhaps an unlikely age for military service.
- 142d *lived to be grown up*: the supposed conversation between Socrates and the young Theaetetus takes place close to Socrates' trial in 399 BCE, after he has been charged (see 210d). As Nails notes (*People of Plato*, 276), 'the remark of Socrates that seems so prescient to Eucleides and Terpsion, the query whether Theaetetus will live to grow up, is appropriately applied to a man who dies before thirty, but hardly for one who reaches forty-six'. If we can trust later reports of Theaetetus' mathematical discoveries (see 147e note), he made them as a young man, on Nails's plausible dating of his death.
- 143a *written down*: Plato's fictional explanation of the provenance of the dialogue stresses the careful and lengthy task Eucleides undertook to record the conversation, including several visits to Athens checking drafts with Socrates. This contrasts with other dialogue frames, such as that for the *Symposium*, which emphasize the distance in time between the supposed conversations and the reporting of them, as well as the lack of first-hand testimony.
- 143c *discussion with them*: Plato here draws attention to his chosen manner of presenting what Socrates narrated to Eucleides as a conversation in dramatic form. Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedo* are but two examples of dialogues featuring conversations narrated in a way Plato now labels 'made tedious by the bits of narration' like 'And I said' and so on. Compare *Republic*

- 392d for the distinction between literary works involving simple narration and those (such as tragedy) involving narration ‘through imitation’ (that is, using direct speech, Plato’s choice in writing the *Theaetetus*).
- 143d *Cyrene*: a prosperous Greek city in North Africa, home of Theodorus, a noted mathematician.
- 143e *less pronounced extent than you*: Socrates is often represented as having the facial features of the comic Silenus (part man, part animal): bulging eyes and a snub nose. Alcibiades makes the comparison in *Symposium* 215b; Critoboulos in Xenophon, *Symposium* 4.19.
- 144a *in other cases*: Theodorus’ praise of the young Theaetetus’ qualities recalls Socrates’ remarks in *Republic* 357c about the rare combination of qualities needed in a philosopher guardian: gentleness and spiritedness: cf. *Republic* 503b.
- 144c *rubbing themselves with oil*: this indicates that the setting is a gymnasium, where the youths have rubbed down after training on the running track. Compare Plato’s *Lysis* and *Charmides*, where Socrates is conversing with or about boys in a wrestling school. Frequented by older men, gymnasiums came to be places of secondary education.
- 145e *So knowledge and wisdom are the same?*: the kinds of knowledge (Greek: *epistēmē*) discussed so far—geometry, astronomy, harmonics, and so forth—are naturally equated with wisdom (*sophia*), seen as a body of expertise. However, in the discussion that follows, examples will be given of knowledge that cannot plausibly be equated with wisdom, such as an eyewitness knowing what happened in a robbery (201b).
- 146a *what, exactly, knowledge really is*: here Socrates introduces the question that the rest of the dialogue tries (in vain) to answer. Many of Plato’s dialogues centre around a question of this form: *Meno*: What is virtue? *Charmides*: What is temperance? *Euthyphro*: What is the pious? A deeper answer is required than the mere verbal equivalence already agreed, that knowledge is wisdom.
- 146b *to get used to it either*: Theodorus will repeat at several points during the conversation that he is unsuited to the kind of abstract discussion Socrates is determined to pursue.
- 146d *several, and a variety instead of something simple*: as in other dialogues (for instance, *Meno* 72a), Socrates rejects as an answer to a question ‘What is X?’ a list of cases of X. He wants a general account, not a list of instances. The complaint ‘a variety instead of something simple’ seems to add the point that the items (geometry, the art of the shoemaker, etc.) are of different kinds. A less likely interpretation is that of the Anonymous Commentator (see Introduction, p. xix) who understands the reproach to be that each item Theaetetus mentions is a species of knowledge and so more complex (that is, more varied) than the genus knowledge, which is something simple.

- 146e *nor how many kinds of knowledge there are*: does Socrates here note two different faults, (a) listing what knowledge is of, and (b) listing kinds of knowledge, or a single fault? It seems to be a single fault, but some critics have singled out point (a), ‘You weren’t asked which things knowledge is of’, to counter suggestions (such as that of F. M. Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (London and New York, 1935), 162), that Plato’s ultimate message to the reader is that knowledge must be of the Forms. Here, these critics claim, Plato makes Socrates indicate that what knowledge is of is not relevant to the question, What is knowledge? See Introduction, p. xxii.
- 147b *knowledge of shoes?*: note the locution ‘someone who doesn’t know knowledge’. The context shows that this is equivalent to ‘who doesn’t know what knowledge is’. The argument here, countering defining knowledge in terms of items such as cobblery, seems to involve a fallacy. It runs as follows: Suppose (1) A doesn’t understand knowledge; hence A doesn’t understand knowledge of shoes; (2) knowledge of shoes is cobblery; so (3) A doesn’t understand cobblery. The fallacy is evident if we replace with: (i) A doesn’t understand parturition; (ii) parturition is giving birth; so (iii) A doesn’t understand giving birth.
- 147c *not to bother about whose it is*: Socrates here offers ‘clay is earth mixed with water’ as a ‘short and commonplace answer’ preferable to a longer one listing types of clay by their users (doll-makers, etc.). This model answer shows that, as well as looking for a unitary definition and not a list, Socrates wants what is known as a real definition, i.e. one stating what the thing really is, not a mere synonym or verbal definition.
- 147d *with your namesake, Socrates here*: this young friend of Theaetetus, present but silent in this dialogue and in the later dialogue the *Sophist*, plays the role of interlocutor in its sequel, the *Statesman* (also called the *Politicus*). Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 1036<sup>b</sup>24) calls him ‘the younger Socrates’.
- 147e *to try to collect all the powers under one term by which we could refer to them all*: these and the subsequent remarks by Theaetetus form a very important and controversial text for historians of Greek mathematics. There is independent evidence of achievements by Theaetetus in the area of number theory found in the report by Pappus (fourth century CE) of the testimony of Eudemus (late fourth century BCE). Plato’s no doubt fictional account constitutes a tribute to the mathematical insights both of the older Theodorus and of the young Theaetetus, as well as a demonstration of the intellectual exercise of offering a general definition covering a number of cases.

Theaetetus relates how Theodorus proved, for all numbers between 3 and 17, which of them had rational square roots (the square integers) and which had irrational square roots (the non-square integers). To do this with diagrams was standard in Greek mathematics where numbers were represented geometrically (by line lengths or figures such as squares or oblongs: see below). The boys then took the opportunity to ‘try to collect the

powers under one term', that is, to give a characterization of each type of number and its square root. In this introductory part of the mathematical interlude, 'powers' has its regular meaning in Greek mathematics of 'squares'. In the sequel (148b) it becomes clear that Theaetetus coins a special use for 'power' to designate the square root of a non-square number. The translation 'At that point he somehow got tied up' suggests an obstacle at or just after the number 17. An alternative translation, 'At that point he stopped for some reason', removes the implication of an obstacle. See, further, M. F. Burnyeat, 'The Philosophical Sense of Theaetetus' Mathematics', *Isis*, 69 (1978), 29–51.

- 148a *an oblong number*: see previous note, and the following one.
- 148b *in the case of solids*: the brief remark about solids may suggest that Plato was writing for a readership aware of the mathematical achievements of Theaetetus (see note on 147e). The main achievement Theaetetus describes here is collecting the piecemeal examples of each category of number and its root, defining the categories, and choosing labels for each: 'lengths' the square roots of square numbers, and 'powers' the square roots of oblong, that is non-square, numbers. See the note on 147e for explanation of the spatial language ('lines that square off equal-sided numbers on plane surfaces . . . lines that square off oblong numbers as powers'). This new use of 'power' is easily related to its more usual usage in Greek mathematical terminology for squares.
- 148d *the many kinds of knowledge*: literally, the many knowledges. However, the task of finding an account to cover all kinds of knowledge is rather different from what Theaetetus achieved (by his own account), since he took a familiar term ('power') and coined a new use of it to designate the square roots of non-square numbers.
- 149a *midwife called Phaenarete?*: the name means 'She who brings to light virtue'. It seems to be historical fact that Socrates' mother was a midwife with this remarkably apt name.
- 149a *that I'm very odd, and that I make people feel difficulties*: features of Plato's portrait of Socrates in many (presumed earlier) dialogues. At *Symposium* 215a Alcibiades promises to describe Socrates' oddness in both appearance and behaviour. At *Meno* 79 Meno has heard about how Socrates makes people feel difficulties, and this is just what Socrates does to many of his interlocutors (for instance, Euthyphro, Charmides, and Meno in the dialogues named after them).
- 149c *likeness to herself*: Artemis, virgin deity and daughter of Zeus, was the goddess of childbirth. But midwives, though now barren, were formerly mothers; in this respect Socrates, who brings wisdom to birth but claims never to have been wise (150c), is more like Artemis than the midwives themselves.
- 150a *appropriate people to make matches correctly*: having listed the roles midwives do play, Socrates regrets that they don't act as matchmakers,

despite being best qualified to do so. This prepares for his remarks on his own practice below (151b).

- 150d *discovered many admirable things in themselves, and given birth to them*: Socrates' disavowal of knowledge is familiar from many dialogues (such as the *Euthyphro* and the *Meno*). Does Plato mean the reader to take the disavowal as sincere? Alternatively, is the claim 'I have no wisdom in me' to be read as irony?

The translation 'I'm not at all wise myself' fits the earlier claim to have no wisdom, but some argue for a weaker translation: 'I'm not completely wise' (D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism* (Oxford, 2004), 31). What is surprising in this extended description of Socrates' midwifery is the claim that some of his charges have made admirable discoveries, since in no dialogue of Plato is this portrayed. Even the very promising Theaetetus will have his offspring rejected as 'not worth bringing up' at the end of the work. Sedley (ibid. 37) speculates that Plato here drops a subtle clue that he himself is the charge of whom Socrates delivered wisdom. Many critics connect Socrates' description of his midwifery with the theory, found in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, that learning is really recollecting, but Burnyeat ('Socratic Midwifery, Platonic Inspiration', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 24 (1977), 7–16) stresses some differences between the midwife image and the theory of recollection.

- 151a *make progress again*: associates of Socrates who make some progress before giving up are familiar from other dialogues, such as Euthyphro, who 'turned aside' at a vital moment (*Euthyphro* 14b–c). 'Aristeides, son of Lysimachus' features in Plato's *Laches* as one of two young associates of Socrates whose fathers are anxious about their education. In the spurious *Theages* (130c–d) Aristeides reportedly claimed that once he left Socrates' presence he became a fool.

Socrates often refers to 'the supernatural sign', his *daimonion*, as preventing him from taking a course of action he was proposing (see *Apology* 40a, 40c).

- 151b *Prodicus, and several to other wise and gifted gentlemen*: Prodicus of Cos, one of the distinguished intellectuals of the day, lectured on the correctness of language; he is the butt of Plato's gentle mockery both here and in his *Protagoras* (for instance, at 315d, 340–1).
- 151d *obscure a truth*: Plato ends his famous image of Socrates as intellectual midwife with a solemn defence of Socrates against charges of ill will.
- 151e *a person who knows something is perceiving the thing that he knows*: this sounds strange if Theaetetus means by 'perceiving' either seeing or hearing and so on, that is, perceiving by sense, since some cases of knowing (such as mathematical knowledge) do not involve sense-perception. Socrates assumes an interpretation in terms of sense-perception, but perhaps Theaetetus is exploiting a different use of 'perceives' and 'perception' meaning,

roughly, ‘notice’, ‘become aware of’, ‘come to understand’; see Glossary, s.v. ‘perception, perceive’. Theaetetus’ suggestion would be more plausible on this different use, since it would fit coming to know a truth of mathematics.

- 151e *knowledge is perception?*: the first proposal from Theaetetus takes the appropriate form, that of giving a single answer intended to cover all kinds of knowledge. Presumably he intends that every case of knowledge is a case of perception, and conversely. Most of the immediate sequel about perception is designed to show that in every case a perception counts as knowledge, but this will be rejected (184–6) with an argument that no case of perception is a case of knowledge.
- 152a *that they are not*: Socrates at once equates Theaetetus’ answer that knowledge is perception with the famous Man–Measure thesis of Protagoras of Abdera. Protagoras was an intellectual who had died around 420 BCE, that is, about twenty years before the dramatic date of the *Theaetetus*. Though he is a major character in Plato’s dialogue the *Protagoras*, it is in the *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus* that his Man–Measure theory is discussed critically.

How should we understand ‘of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not’? The sequel will show that this formula is to be taken to claim that each man is the measure of what is so, that it is so (e.g. of the wind’s being cold, that it is cold). To be the measure of a thing’s being or not being something is to be correct about its being or not being thus. Throughout the work, talk of being (or reference to ‘things that are’) usually amounts to talk of being something or other, or to things that are something or other. It picks up locutions such as ‘The wine is sweet’ (predicative uses of ‘is’) rather than locutions such as ‘The wine exists’ (existential uses of ‘is’). See Glossary, s.v. ‘being, to be’.

- 152a *you and I are, each of us, a man?*: here, as at *Cratylus* 385e, Plato makes Socrates interpret the Man–Measure dictum as a claim that *each person* is a measure (in the sense explained above). Later (172a) Protagoras is represented as claiming that a given *polis* (state, society) is the measure of what is just and unjust. Some speculate that the historical Protagoras meant that mankind as a whole is the measure (e.g. of what is right and wrong, or sweet and bitter), but Plato’s remarks offer no evidence for that reading.
- 152c *the way he perceives them*: by this point Socrates has achieved part of his goal of equating Theaetetus’ proposal that knowledge is perception with Protagoras’ Man–Measure theory. That theory holds that the wind *is* cold for the one who *feels* it thus, i.e. the one to whom it appears thus. Next he says ‘this “appears” is perceiving’, using ‘appears’ in its perceptual use. Later it will be broadened to include people’s beliefs.

- 152c *as if it's knowledge*: Socrates completes his 'proof' (see previous note) by arguing that an error-free grasp of *what is* counts as knowledge; hence perception amounts to knowledge. Among problems with the argument are (1) all that has been argued is that I perceive *what is for me*: but this is a problematic notion and hardly counts as a grasp of truth; (2) even though knowledge requires an error-free grasp of truth, that may not be enough for a state to count as knowledge; (3) the argument has at most shown that each appearing, i.e. perception, counts as knowledge, but not that each instance of knowledge is an appearing.
- 152c *in secret?*: a clear hint to the reader that the Flux theory that follows was not part of Protagoras' teaching. See also 156a.
- 152e *are coming to be*: Greek here avoids any use of 'to be'; otherwise the theory's statement would break its own rule.
- 152e *always coming to be*: this kernel of the Flux theory will be presented more fully from 153d. In this sketch Socrates moves confusingly from a claim about relatives 'if you speak of something as big, it will also appear small' (cf. *Republic* 5. 479) to a claim that 'nothing ever is, but things are always coming to be'. 'Come to be' (Greek *gignesthai*) is used to indicate not only creation and change, but also any less than stable or determinate state of being, while *einai*, 'to be', can indicate stability.
- 152e *everything is the offspring of flux and change*: the impressive array of 'authorities' who held a theory that all is in flux is no doubt partly ironic, especially since it includes poets such as Epicharmus and Homer. Heraclitus was a noted Ionian philosopher; the alleged flux theory of his followers will be scrutinized and rejected in 179e–183b. Empedocles introduced the notion of cosmic cycles and opposed Parmenides' denial of change.
- 153c *and what's bad is the opposite?*: sc. of change. Readers familiar with the thesis found elsewhere in Plato's works that true being is unchanging (e.g. *Phaedo* 78–9; *Republic* 6. 485) will be sceptical of these 'proofs' that change is good, drawn from the homely examples of fire-sticks and so forth.
- 153c *Homer's golden chain*: *Iliad* 8. 19–27. Zeus mockingly proposes a tug-of-war with the other deities using a golden rope.
- 154a *something peculiar to each one*: whereas at 152d the theory forbade saying that a thing *is* heavy (because it will also appear light), now it warns against thinking a white colour is anywhere at all; rather it *comes into being* when objects collide—presumably, as 156d will show, a seeing eye and a seen object. The seen white colour is 'peculiar to each' perceiver: this seems to introduce items similar to the sense-data of more recent theories of perception.
- 154a *never in a similar condition to yourself?*: here Socrates draws some unexpected and extreme consequences from the theory. A colour never seems



the same to you on different occasions, let alone to two different people. Why should these be supposed to follow? The Flux theory was introduced to grant incorrigibility to our perceptions (152c), so that another person can't correct my claim about how the wind feels to me. This is a far cry from the present insistence that no two perceptions can ever be the same—not even my own on two occasions—and it is a mystery why Theaetetus calls this 'nearer the truth'.

- 154b *Protagoras . . . would say*: on this allegedly Protagorean theory, we say something absurd if we say of an object ('what we measure ourselves against or touch'; cf. the Man-Measure dictum, 152a) that it *is* large or white, etc., without qualification. Why? Because what *is* *F* can never *appear not F* to anyone. By this well-known but fallacious reasoning (discussed in M. F. Burnyeat, 'Conflicting Appearances', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 65 (1979), 69–111) we could infer that a tower *is* not square, since it can appear round to a far-off observer! As 157b will make clear, the theory demands that we say, 'X comes to be white to subject S' instead of 'X is white'. An analogous (and more plausible) claim is made about perceiving subjects—'what does the measuring or touching': if a subject were intrinsically a perceiver-of-hot, she could never have felt cold when touching an iceberg.
- 154d *say that there is*: Theaetetus' answer shows he is rightly puzzled. The problem is that 'X becomes larger' can mean either 'becomes larger than it was' (in which case the answer 'no' is correct: a thing can't become larger than it was without 'undergoing increase') or it can mean 'become larger than something else'. For this reading, no change of size in X is needed, and that fits the example of six dice compared to twelve and to four.
- 154d *tag from Euripides . . . but not your heart*: Euripides, *Hippolytus* 312: 'my tongue is sworn but my heart is unsworn'.
- 155c *since I haven't lost any of my size, I couldn't ever have been coming to be smaller*: the distinction drawn in the note on 154d is important here: smaller than what? Indeed, Socrates here predicts that in a year's time he will be smaller (than Theaetetus), 'not because I've lost any of my size but because you've grown'. If Theaetetus outgrows him, Socrates will be smaller, but will he have been 'coming to be smaller'? If not, then the thesis at 155b1–3 is the one to reject. The moral of the dice and size puzzles seems to be that care must be taken to spell out in full the relative expressions such as 'more', 'fewer', 'larger', and so on: more *than such and such*. This parallels the insistence of the Man-Measure thesis that you must always say *for whom* an object is sweet or cold and so on.
- 155d *Iris was the daughter of Thaumás*: Hesiod, *Theogony* 265. The name Thaumás echoes the Greek word for wonder, *thauma*. The wonder Socrates speaks of is a kind of puzzlement caused when one notices a conflict among theses all of which seem plausible.

- 156a *much more subtle*: the uninitiates (that is, those not initiated into secrets or mysteries) who don't admit comings to be are contrasted with those aware of the mysteries—the teachings about kinds of change to be expounded in 156a–157c—who are 'more subtle'. 'Secrets' recalls 152c10, where Plato indicated that the theory was not in fact one Protagoras taught. We can assume that Plato invented the theory Socrates goes on to expound in order to give a metaphysical underpinning to Protagorean relativism.
- 156b *brought to birth together with the perceived thing*: the theory of perception is now fleshed out, and postulates twin parents (156d) and twin offspring to explain a perceptual encounter such as the eye's seeing a white stone (156e). First Socrates discusses the 'parents', calling them 'two kinds of change', one active (e.g. a stone) and one passive (e.g. an eye), though both are said to generate and bring to birth simultaneously twins: a perception such as seeing white, and a perceived thing, white colour. It is strange that a stone is called a change (at 156a–b, and at c11 a slow change); perhaps the slow changes are not the sense-organs and objects themselves, but are processes within these. But Plato's language does not obviously suggest this.
- 156b *desires, fears, and others*: why are these included with 'seeings, hearings, smellings'? Desires and fears are not perceptions, and there need be no 'active parent'—no external object causing them. But if part of the point of the theory is to emphasize the privacy (see 154a) and incorrigibility of perceptions, then their inclusion is more understandable.
- 156c *colours of every kind with seeings of every kind*: the theory insists that an object becomes white only when a seeing of white occurs, a view congenial to Berkeley (*Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*) but in conflict with the common-sense understanding 'Full many a flower is born to blush unseen' (Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*).
- 156c *keeps its changing in the same place*: the 'parents'—the stone or the sense-organ—may change in some way but they do not travel, as the offspring (seeing colour, and colour) are somehow supposed to do.
- 156e *to have that sort of colour*: this stretch repeats the claim that colour and seeing colour (the 'cognate' perception) come into being together (the twin offspring); and adds three points. First, such momentary offspring are non-repeatable (156d7–8); secondly, when the seeing and the whiteness are born, the eye becomes an eye that sees, and the stone a white stone; thirdly, and most puzzlingly, the twin offspring travel somehow between eye and object. It is hard to make literal sense of the travelling involved, but the overall idea that perception involves rays of some kind is not new. The main point is that stones are not white by themselves but only come to be white *for* (that is, in a perceptual meeting with) a sense-organ. 'Whiteness' here means an instance of the colour white.
- 157a *some time ago*: 152d.

- 157a *when it bumps into something else*: a new point. Earlier the ‘parents’ were classified as either agents (a stick or a stone) or patients (an eye or a hand). But the terms ‘thing which acts’ and ‘thing which is acted on’ are themselves also, the theory now explains, relative to a given occasion of perception. A hand, for instance, may both *act on* an eye (that is, be seen by it) and then *be acted on* by, for instance, a surface it touches.
- 157a *as we’ve been saying since the beginning*: 152d and 157a. Earlier the theory recommended saying ‘X comes to be F’, not ‘X is F’; now it insists on adding ‘for someone’.
- 157b *brings things to a standstill . . . easy to refute in doing that*: an intriguing addition. Use of ‘is’ was outlawed, in part no doubt because Greek *esti* (is) had a ‘durative nuance’, that is, implied lastingness. But why should ‘something’, ‘my’, ‘this’, and so on also be outlawed as indicating permanence? Similar arguments are found at *Cratylus* 430d8–11 and *Timaeus* 49d4–e4. If the prohibition is taken seriously, the theory itself could not be stated, since it would arguably need to use ‘this’ or ‘something’ to describe what happens in perception. All this supports the interpretation by which Plato does not mean this theory seriously: see Introduction, p. xxi.
- 157c *taken together in collections*: the interpretation of this is much disputed, and affects how we understand the metaphysics presupposed by the theory of perception. (1) Most recent commentators (including Bostock, Burnyeat, and Sedley) understand it to refer to collections of perceptions, such that even sticks and stones turn out not to be independent objects but only transient bundles of perceptions, rather like Berkeley’s collections of ideas (Berkeley, *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, §1). In favour of this interpretation is 159e8–160a1. But, against this view, note that from the start the theory has assumed continuing objects as ‘parents’ (the same wind of 152b affecting me and you; a stone that appears heavy to one, light to another). Only a few lines above, the theory has claimed that the same thing can be active in one encounter, passive in another, and this is hard to fit with the idea that objects are merely collections of perceptions. (2) An alternative reading (L. Campbell, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Oxford, 1883); L. Brown, ‘Understanding the *Theaetetus*’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 11 (1993), 199–224) understands collections to be kinds, so that the prohibition on saying ‘This stone is white’ is now extended to include ‘Stones are white’ or ‘Feathers are light’.
- 157c *just trying me out*: by giving Theaetetus this remark, Plato acknowledges to the reader that the theory is indeed a surprising one.
- 157c *I’m practising midwifery on you*: cf. 149a–151d, especially 149d1–2 for ‘incantations’. When Socrates adds to his usual disavowal of knowledge that he doesn’t even ‘claim as my own’ what he has said, he indicates that he doesn’t even believe it.

- 158a *to whom they appear?*: a reminder that the two theses (knowledge is perception, and things that appear to anyone are for that person) have been equated (see 152a–c). So the objection based on dreaming is presented as a difficulty to both theories.
- 158e *which of those judgements are true?*: the much-discussed problem of dreaming is one of which Theaetetus has ‘often heard’; he has acknowledged (1) the problem of offering *evidence* that one is awake, given (2) the correspondence between dream-states and being awake. Even if (2) is disputable (see J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford, 1962), 42), (1) is a real problem. Socrates’ question about a ‘clear way of showing which . . . judgements’—the waking or dreaming ones—‘are true’ presages later discussion of the criterion of truth in post-Aristotelian schools of philosophy such as Stoicism and Epicureanism. Note that instead of perceptions Socrates now talks of ‘judgements’ (cf. Theaetetus at 158b). One counter to scepticism based on dreaming denies that in dreams we have either perceptions or judgements. Another response insists that when we’re awake we know we are awake even if we can’t offer *evidence* or a *way of showing* that we are.
- 158e *what seems to anyone on any occasion is true for the person who thinks so*: Protagoras’ original claim (152a7–9) is now rephrased in terms of what *seems* (instead of what appears), broadening the claim from perceptions to what people *think*. But the following discussion of the phenomena of changed tastes due to illness (cf. ‘diseases’ linked with dreams at 157e) in fact stays in the realm of perceptions.
- 159a *and if it’s made unlike, it becomes different?*: Socrates here offers some outrageous principles and makes highly dubious use of them. Contrary to what he claims, something can become unlike (what it was before)—say, by being painted a new colour—without thereby becoming a different thing. But that is how the principle will be interpreted below, with the example of Socrates falling ill becoming a different thing from Socrates well (159c5).
- 159a *saying earlier . . . are acted on?*: 156a.
- 159c *it will deal with me as another thing?*: see the two previous notes. This strange claim follows only from the false principle that what is unlike is different (159a9–10).
- 159d *sweet to the healthy tongue*: drawing on what they ‘agreed before’ (156a–e) Socrates restates the theory of perception as applied to how wine (‘the thing which acts’) tastes to a tongue (‘the thing which is acted on’). The generated quick movements, perception (that is, tasting sweetness) and sweetness, are again described in puzzling ways: cf. 156d–e with note on 156e.
- 159d *come up against something unlike*: that Socrates ill is not the same person as Socrates well is illicitly derived from the claim that he is ‘unlike’ his earlier self after falling ill. Despite the dubious argumentation, the resulting

view fits well with the interpretation of the theory according to which there are no continuants (such as persons) at all, but only ‘collections of perceptions’: see 157c with note.

- 160a *qualified in that way for itself*: here Socrates has drawn three conclusions, (1) a new object will cause a new perception in Socrates (159e8–160a1), (2) an object will never generate the same perception in a new person (rather, it will ‘come to be otherwise qualified’), (3) Socrates won’t perceive anything by himself and an object won’t have a perceived quality on its own. (3) is just a restatement of the ‘twin parents’ theory of perception. (1) and (2) state definitively what Socrates hinted at in 154a: see note. What the theory needed to show (to secure incorrigibility of perceptions) is that the same wine *may not* taste the same to you as it does to me, and that we cannot compare our perceptions. Instead, (2) makes the much stronger claim that it *cannot* taste the same to you as to me. Not only is this highly counter-intuitive, but even a theory of total flux cannot guarantee that entirely similar perceptions will not recur. Perhaps all Socrates is claiming is that the very same perception cannot occur on another occasion? That would be correct, but the language suggests the stronger theses (1) and (2), especially in the claim that (for instance) wine tasted by a different person will come to be ‘otherwise qualified’, that is, qualitatively different, as well as a numerically different perception.
- 160b *necessity ties our being together*: ‘necessity’ picks up ‘necessarily’ from Socrates’ previous remark. This is just a dramatic way of restating what the theory has maintained all along: that (say) a stone comes to be white only for a given observer (or eye) on a given occasion.
- 160b *or in relation to something*: see previous note. Something is white or sweet only *for someone* or *in relation to something*. At this point both ‘being’ and ‘coming to be’ are permitted locutions, provided ‘for so and so’ is added.
- 160c *always of the being that’s mine*: this does not claim that I always perceive my own being, but that I always perceive how things are for me, as in Socrates’ previous remark.
- 160c *that they are not*: Socrates repeats the gloss on the Man–Measure dictum that he gave at 152a.
- 160d *knowledge of the things I’m a perceiver of?*: with ‘free from falsehood’, cf. 152c5. By developing a theory of perception which (if correct) guarantees that perception is error-free, Socrates has given grounds for the claim that knowledge is perception, or at least for the claim that every case of perception is a case of knowledge.
- 160d *turned out to coincide*: at 152a Socrates claimed that Theaetetus’ definition (knowledge is perception) stated the same theory as Protagoras’ Man–Measure thesis, and by 152d he was beginning to outline a flux theory

that underpins Man–Measure. The intervening pages have made good the promise to show that the three theses ‘coincide’.

- 161a *first childbirth?*: the ‘inspection ceremony’ (literally, running around, hence ‘circling all round it in our argument’) took place a few days after the birth of a child, with naming and gifts from relatives. Socrates here likens the critical examination of the threefold theory that follows (up to 186e) to such a ceremony, but in this case the offspring will be found not ‘worth bringing up’.
- 161b *not to say anything myself*: Socrates’ claim that *none of the arguments comes from me* rings rather hollow in the light of his confident exposition since 152b.
- 161d *tadpole, let alone another human being*: Protagoras will reply to this objection at 162e3–6, claiming it is based merely on plausibility.
- 161e *each of us is himself the measure of his own wisdom?*: this objection—that the Man–Measure theory is incompatible with Protagoras’ own claim to be wise himself—is also made in *Cratylus* 385–6. Protagoras’ answer to it starts at 166d. The description of the theory as holding that no one can *discriminate* for another person or be *authoritative* over that other’s opinions exactly captures its key theses (in contrast to some earlier statements: see note on 160a).
- 161e *if everyone’s are correct*: note that ‘for the person concerned’ is left out. ‘Dialectic’ is a term Plato coined for the serious attempt to arrive at the truth through argument; to do so would be pointless if *all* beliefs are true.
- 162a *Protagoras’ Truth*: said to have been the title of Protagoras’ work whose first sentence was the statement that man is the measure of all things. It is reported to have had a further title of *Overthrowers*, apparently describing arguments.
- 162b *wrestling-rings*: perhaps an allusion to the second title of Protagoras’ work: see previous note.
- 162c *no worse . . . than . . . man or even god?*: a new point, to which Protagoras replies at 162e.
- 162e *the gods . . . are any or not*: an attested fragment of Protagoras has a fuller version of this: ‘Concerning the gods I am unable to know either that they are or that they are not, or what their appearance is like. For many are the things that hinder knowledge’: quoted in Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Protagoras* 9.51.
- 162e *any farmyard animal whatever*: picking up the criticism of 161c–d, according to which any creature with perception, including a pig, would be as good a measure as a man. It is striking to find Protagoras represented by Socrates as dismissing ‘plausibility’ (the stock in trade of sophists) and favouring proof (that of mathematicians as well as philosophers).

- 163c *linguists teach about them*: Theaetetus here answers one of a series of criticisms, not directly of Protagoras' thesis but of the equation of knowledge with perception, that is, 'what our whole argument has been aimed at'. To the suggestion that one can hear or see but not know a foreign language, Theaetetus makes this clever reply: what we see and hear in such a language (shapes, colours, and sounds) we also know, and what we don't know ('what . . . linguists teach') we don't see either.
- 163d *might not know it*: the objection from memory that begins here continues until 164b, and is this: one who remembers X knows X but is not perceiving X, say because he has shut his eyes (163e12), so apparently he both knows and does not know X. For the reply, see 166b.
- 164c *logic-chopping way*: Plato often makes Socrates distinguish his methods from those of logic-chopping sophists such as the brothers in the *Euthydemus*; hence Socrates' self-rebuke here.
- 164e *come to its support ourselves*: the language of 'trustees' and 'support' heralds Socrates' promise to defend the long-dead Protagoras' thesis in the manner of a trustee charged with protecting an 'orphan'.
- 165a *Callias . . . bare argument to geometry*: Callias was a very rich patron of intellectuals, so presumably Protagoras' 'trustee' in financial (not intellectual) matters. Callias' house is the setting for Plato's *Protagoras*, where Socrates encounters and questions Protagoras and other sophists. In saying he turned away from 'bare argument' Theodorus is excusing himself for not being adept at philosophical discussion, or perhaps at anti-logic or logic-chopping (164c).
- 165b *both know something and not know the thing he knows?*: this 'most formidable question' will later be important (see 188a). But here it heralds some logic-chopping objections, against which Theaetetus is on his guard.
- 165c *in the sort of way I said, anyway*: Theaetetus sees where the imaginary objector is going, and tries to fend off the criticism by including the qualification 'in the sort of way'. The logic-chopping brothers of the *Euthydemus* likewise try to trap Socrates in contradiction by disallowing a qualified answer (e.g. at *Euthydemus* 296b1–6).
- 165d *opposite of what I put forward*: Theaetetus sees that his new conclusion must be that someone *can* both know and not know the same thing, on the grounds that seeing is knowing, and one can both see (with one eye) and not see (with the other eye) the same thing.
- 165e *got you all tangled up*: Socrates indicates that the other objections the imaginary questioner could pose—about knowing 'clearly' or 'dimly', knowing 'intensely' or 'mildly'—are also of a logic-chopping variety; 'enviable wisdom' is ironic.
- 165e *at whatever price you and he agreed*: this new twist to the picture of the logic-chopping questioner puts the reader in mind of the practice of Protagoras himself (referred to at Plato, *Protagoras* 328b–c) by which,

when a pupil was unwilling to pay the full fee, Protagoras made him go to a temple to declare on oath what sum he thought appropriate to the instruction he'd received.

- 166a *contempt for us and saying*: from this point to 168c Socrates gives the personified Protagoras a remarkable defence of his position.
- 166b *of the same sort as the original one?*: if the translation here is correct, then Protagoras responds to the 'memory objection' (163d6) by allowing that remembering is a kind of *experiencing* (hence, perceiving) but of a different sort from the original perception (seeing, hearing, etc.). An alternative translation is 'if one is no longer experiencing something'. On this reading, Protagoras insists that remembering is indeed an experience very like the original seeing or hearing. On either reading, Protagoras can maintain that remembering is knowing by insisting it is some sort of perception.
- 166c *to chase after words*: two further replies offered by the imagined Protagoras to the memory objection (163d6): (a) it is possible for the same person to know and not know at the same time; (b) there's no such thing as the same person at different times, given the facts of *alteration*. (b) recalls 159a–e where Socrates made a similar claim in developing the theory of perception. On some understandings it is a key tenet of that theory that there are no continuing perceivers or perceived objects.
- 166d *good things both appear and be for him*: here begins the important 'defence of Protagoras' against the key objection (161de) that his theory means there are no wise men, which thus devalues his own teaching. The sequel shows that the formula 'make good things both appear and be' is to be understood as 'appear and be sweet' (166e), 'appear and be just' (167c), and so on.
- 167a *the things which are not*: this phrase is equivalent to 'things which are false'. See Glossary, s.v. 'being, to be'. It will play a key role in 188c–189b, where Socrates produces an argument against false judgement in terms of the impossibility of judging the things which are not.
- 167b *appearances which some people . . . call true; but I call them better . . . not at all truer*: though the interpretation is controversial, the best way to reconstruct the argument is as follows. Just as a doctor 'makes the change with drugs' (167a7) so that beneficial things appear sweet to the recovered patient (and not the harmful ones he had craved when ill, while normal food appeared bitter because of his illness), so, on this ingenious account, an educator can change a pupil by instilling a 'beneficial condition' in place of a harmful one, meaning that the pupil has judgements (that is, beliefs) that are now *better* than the previous ones but *not truer*. Tastes—finding something bitter or sweet—can be worse or better (that is, for the person whose tastes they are), but the worse ones are not false. Just so, this ingenious defence suggests, judgements (beliefs) can be better or worse but are in all cases true. This hints that questions of better



or worse are not relative to different people's judgements: something that will be made explicit at 172b.

167b *calling them frogs*: see 161d, 'no better . . . than a tadpole'.

167c *plants are sick . . . and true too . . . instead of harmful ones*: a third case, the wise cultivator, is added to that of the doctor and the educator. The cultivator improves sick plants and gives them healthy perceptions. For the idea that plants have feelings, see Plato's *Timaeus* 77b. 'And true too' is odd, since Protagoras has insisted that all perceptions are true—worse and better alike.

167c *actually is just and admirable for it, as long as that state accepts it*: here the imagined Protagoras makes an important addition to his theory (see Introduction, p. xii). Now it is a state (a *polis*), not a person, that is the measure of what is 'just and admirable', and a wise politician is one who can make a 'beneficial' policy (say, pardoning the losers in a civil war) seem just and admirable to the state, in place of the previous harmful policy. The upshot is that whatever a state's laws and conventions decree to be just *is* just. The move from the individual to the state as measure is striking, and entails a problem Socrates does not point out: the possible conflict between the decrees of a state on what is just, and the view of an individual citizen.

167d *sophist . . . those he has educated*: Protagoras here returns (from discussing politicians) to the case of a sophist who teaches individuals, and restates the line of argument from 167a–b.

167d *being a measure whether you like it or not*: see 161e.

167d *in a speech; or . . . by asking questions*: in Plato's *Protagoras* Socrates offered these two approaches to Protagoras, declaring him an expert at both methods (329b, 334e).

168b *when they get older*: the personified Protagoras draws on many Socratic themes in this homily on the proper conduct of debate, warning against controversy and advocating serious and cooperative dialectic (cf. 161e).

168b *actually is for that person or state*: Protagoras here combines both versions of the Man–Measure theory; see 167c with note.

168c *all sorts of difficulties*: objections involving 'the habitual use of expressions and words' may include ones such as at 165d: can one know clearly or dimly?

168d *boy's fear?*: see 166a.

169a *measure about diagrams . . . astronomy . . . excelling in*: cajoling the reluctant Theodorus to take part in the debate, Socrates recalls the topics on which he is an expert (145a–d). Socrates will exploit the notion of expertise to refute Protagoras (178b–e).

169b *wrestle with you in an argument*: for the Spartans, see 162b. Sciron was a ruthless highwayman who kicked his quarry into the sea, and was killed

in turn by Theseus. Antaeus compelled men to wrestle with him, and was dispatched in turn by Heracles.

169c *thread of destiny . . . you spin*: the bombastic Theodorus here alludes to Clotho, the goddess who spun men's fates.

169d *those people who are wise*: before nailing Protagoras directly on the subject of wisdom or expertise (178b–e), Socrates mounts an argument which starts from the ubiquitous belief in expertise, that is, the belief that some judgements are false.

170a *actually is for the person to whom it seems?*: here Socrates restates the Man–Measure thesis accurately, with the important clause 'for the person', which later he will omit.

170b *ignorance is false judgement?*: after showing that men's actions in times of danger reveal that they hold there are experts and non-experts, Socrates adds a point Protagoras earlier disputed, that the ignorance of the non-experts is false judgement. (Protagoras had said it was bad, not false, judgement: 166d–167b.)

170c *from both alternatives it follows*: a classic dilemma argument. Given the premiss already established, that men believe there is false judgement (call that belief P), then either, if all beliefs are true, then P is true, and so there is false judgement and not all beliefs are true; or not all beliefs are true, so again not all beliefs are true. The argument is elegant and ingenious but faces a major problem: Socrates should have phrased his question as 'Should we say that people always judge things which are true for them?'

170e *as far as the theory is concerned*: in explaining how the Man–Measure theory deals with a conflict of judgments between, say, Theodorus and opponents (it will say that 'what you judge . . . is true for you but false for . . .'), Socrates restores the qualifying expressions 'for so-and-so' and uses the rare formula 'true for you'. (So far he has used an equivalent expression: 'is for the person to whom it seems', e.g. at 170a.)

170e *what about for Protagoras himself?*: Socrates moves from what to say in general about conflicting beliefs to considering a conflict between Protagoras and the rest of mankind on the very subject of the Man–Measure thesis.

171a *to whom it does*: Socrates has embarked on a new dilemma argument (cf. 170c). Assume everyone else holds that the Man–Measure thesis is false (as they do). (a) If Protagoras too thinks it false, then *it wasn't the truth for anyone*. (b) If Protagoras believes the Man–Measure thesis but no one else does, then (b1) *it's more the case that it isn't the truth than it is*, being true for one but false for many. (For the next step, called 'very subtle', read on.)

171a *that everyone . . . the things which are*: that is, Protagoras claims that all beliefs are true.

171b *will be disputed by everyone, beginning with Protagoras himself*: the final twist in the argument (conclusion b2) of the dilemma. Given he holds that all beliefs are true, Protagoras must *admit that that judgement of theirs* (that is, the opponents' belief that the Man–Measure thesis is false) *is true too*. Once again Socrates leaves out the qualifying phrases (see 170c with note). If we restore them, we get merely that Protagoras must concede that the opponents' view (that Man–Measure is false) is true *for them*, hence Man–Measure is false for them, and it is true for Protagoras that it is false for them (even though it is true for him). Whether any sense could be made of this elaborate formulation is another matter. But if Protagoras were to object that Socrates' argument is faulty, he would thereby show that he rejects the Man–Measure thesis; cf. note on 171d.

Though the self-refutation argument is apparently flawed, Plato seems to have discerned a key objection to relativism. Protagoras asserted his Man–Measure thesis, but surely to assert something is to assert it as true: true absolutely, and not just true for the speaker. 'A commitment to truth absolute is bound up with the very act of assertion' (M. F. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis, 1990), 30).

171c *Protagoras' Truth isn't true for anyone: not for anyone else, and not for Protagoras himself*: on *Truth*, see 166c with note, and cf. 170e7. See previous note for a doubt whether the argument warrants the claim that on Protagoras' own admission the Man–Measure thesis is false.

171d *duck down again and rush off*: what does this image signify? Myles Burnyeat ('Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', *Philosophical Review*, 85 (1976), 192 n. 23) suggests Protagoras is a ghost from the underworld, underlining the idea that the previous argument holds 'only in Protagoras' world'. Plato probably expects the reader to infer that the objection offered by the imaginary Protagoras who has 'popped up' would be that Socrates didn't play fair because he didn't add 'for Protagoras' or 'for the others' in the recent refutations, as noted at several points above. However, in warning that he could 'convict me [Socrates] of talking a great deal of nonsense', Protagoras implies that refutation *is* possible, contrary to what the Man–Measure thesis declares (see L. Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation* (Cambridge, 2010), 65).

171e *is superior to another*: Socrates refers back to the 'defence of Protagoras' (166d–167d), but now makes explicit what was left unstated before, namely, that in the defence some exceptions are made to the relativist thesis. In questions about 'what's healthy and unhealthy' there are experts (unlike questions of what's 'hot, dry, sweet', etc.), and, by implication, objective truths.

172b *carry on their philosophy on some such lines as these*: a very significant passage, again bringing out explicitly an implicit point from 167d. Though relativism is conceded to hold for judgements of what's admirable, just, or in conformity with religion (that is, pious), things are different with

judgements of what's advantageous or disadvantageous (cf. 'beneficial', 167c) where the thesis itself 'will admit that . . . one adviser' or one state 'is superior to another'. That it's an objective matter whether a treatment or policy is advantageous is now apparently conceded by all parties, including Protagoras. However, Edward Hussey ('Rescuing Protagoras', in S. Lovibond and S. G. Williams (eds.), *Essays for David Wiggins* (Oxford, 1996)) argues that Protagoras can be read as a 'proto-pragmatist', appealing to an intersubjective (but not fully objective) notion of what is more advantageous.

As at 167c, the new version makes judgements of what's just or pious relative to states (not merely to individuals), and insists that none of these concepts (what's just, pious, or admirable) 'has by nature a being of its own'. We don't know who Socrates has in mind when he refers to those who take the view outlined as 'those who don't altogether assert Protagoras' theory'. Perhaps the kind of cultural relativism proposed was something of a commonplace in intellectual circles.

- 172c *law-courts to make speeches*: here Socrates embarks on a striking digression comparing true philosophers with men of politics and the courts. It is a familiar point from *Republic* 7. 517d that philosophers cut a poor figure in law-courts, one made poignant by the imminent trial of Socrates referred to at the end of the dialogue, 210d. Sedley's close reading of the digression (*Midwife of Platonism*, 65–8) contains many useful insights.
- 172d *hit on that which is*: that is, on the truth: perhaps to be understood as true reality, the province of the philosopher (*Republic* books 5–7).
- 172e *by the clock*: the court's water clock, which indicated speaking time available to each party.
- 173d *the way to the market place*: perhaps an indication that this high-minded philosopher is not to be identified with Socrates himself, who habitually conversed in the market place.
- 174a *geometry . . . astronomy . . . the total nature of each of the things which are*: the inclusion of geometry and astronomy serves two purposes. It aligns Theodorus' pursuits with those of philosophers, and it recalls the provision made in *Republic* book 7 that education in mathematics must precede that in philosophy.
- 174a *Thales*: a famous thinker from Miletus, who was said to have predicted an eclipse and was credited with many scientific discoveries.
- 175d *avoid the other*: another reminiscence of the *Republic*, this time of books 1–4, where Socrates investigates 'justice and injustice themselves—what each of them is'—and their relation to 'human happiness'.
- 176a *opposite to the good*: this tag became famous in later Platonist thought.
- 176b *become as nearly as possible like a god*: the ideal of becoming like god was a famous topos in later Platonism, in writers from Alcinous to Proclus. See D. Sedley, 'The Ideal of Godlikeness', in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato*, ii (New

- York, 1999); and (for the reception of the notion) D. Baltzly, 'The Virtues and "Becoming like God": Alcinous to Proclus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 26 (2004), 297–321.
- 177a *becoming like one of the patterns and unlike the other*: the term 'patterns' (*paradeigmata*), used for Platonic Forms in *Parmenides* 132, may be taken as a reference to such Forms. But Sedley (*Midwife of Platonism*, 78–9) notes that 176a–c strongly suggests that god is the good pattern, leaving it unclear what the bad pattern is. *Republic* book 5 does, remarkably, mention a Form of the Unjust.
- 177b *all really a digression anyway*: a digression whose ostensible function was to distinguish the true philosopher from court orators (174c) and from ruthless politicians who prefer injustice to being stupid (176d). But it has a further function, allowing Socrates to affirm his belief in objective standards of justice (in the claim that the philosopher studies justice and becomes just), as against the view outlined earlier (172a–b) that justice and other values have by nature no being of their own, but are simply what any state decrees.
- 177d *unless he's talking about the word*: Socrates rephrases the modified relativist thesis of 171–172b, with its key distinction between (a) moral judgements and (b) judgements of what's good or 'useful' (cf. 'advantageous' (172a) and 'beneficial' (167c)). Even if moral matters may be thought to depend on the beliefs of a state or a person, no one could claim that about questions of what is and isn't useful.
- 178e *what's going to be convincing . . . law-courts?*: Socrates cleverly adds Protagoras' own expertise—judging the likely persuasiveness of a forensic speech—to the motley list of skills mentioned: those of the doctor, wine-grower, musician, and pastry chef. All of these experts, unlike the layman, have authoritative judgement about the *future*, even if the layman can't be corrected in his judgement of what *now* tastes sweet, etc.
- 179b *whether I liked it or not*: Socrates rounds off this refutation based on the nature of expertise with a final flourish, underscoring the incongruity of Protagoras 'trying to force' him to be a measure, that is, trying to convince him he is wrong, since, by the Man–Measure doctrine, he can't be wrong.
- 179b *most decisively refuted*: perhaps Plato expects the reader to share Theodorus' judgement that the refutation based on expertise (178–9) is stronger than the 'self-refutation' argument of 170–1.
- 179d *perception and knowledge are the same thing*: the claim that one's present experience delivers perceptions and judgements that are true is explicitly allowed to stand for now. It will be scrutinized in 184–6, where perception is finally disentangled from judgement and it is proved that knowledge is quite distinct from perception.

- 179d *the followers of Heraclitus*: the Flux theory—of ‘that being which is in motion’—is explicitly attributed not to Heraclitus himself (of Ephesus, in Ionia) but to certain followers, of whom a highly satirical picture is painted (180a–c) before Socrates offers a refutation of the theory. Some confirmation that Heraclitus’ followers held extreme views, with a consequence for the use of language, comes from Aristotle’s description of Cratylus (*Metaphysics* 1010<sup>a</sup>7–15). Calling him the most extreme of those who proclaimed themselves Heracliteans, Aristotle says ‘Cratylus in the end considered that he ought to say nothing, and merely pointed his finger.’
- 180b *expel it from everywhere*: though Theodorus’ description is highly comical, what he says about the Heracliteans’ (mis)use of language may find an echo in Aristotle’s remark about Cratylus: see previous note.
- 180e *not having a space in which to move*: the theory that ‘everything is one and . . . at rest’ is ascribed to Melissus and Parmenides, thinkers known as monists. But Socrates will explain at 183d–184b why he will not be diverted from the inquiry into knowledge to exploring the thesis that all is at rest. In his later *Sophist* (249a–d) Plato makes the main speaker (no longer Socrates) conclude that neither the Flux thesis, that ‘everything changes at all times’, nor the ‘all is at rest’ thesis is correct.
- “‘Unchanging” . . . name for the whole’ may be a loose rendering of a known fragment of Parmenides B8.38 or an independent fragment. See *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments*, ed. and trans. D. Gallop (Toronto, 1984).
- 181b *if neither side seems to be saying anything reasonable*: see previous note. ‘Partisans of the whole’ refers to Melissus and Parmenides. The term translated ‘partisan’ (Greek *stasiōtēs*) puns on the word for stability.
- 182a *everything must be always changing with every kind of change*: having distinguished two kinds of change, alteration and movement, Socrates insists, perhaps oddly, that an adherent of flux must hold that everything is always changing in both respects, indeed with every kind of change. We may wonder whether the theory of perception, described earlier and soon to be repeated, was committed to such radical flux; commentators differ on this question.
- 182a *‘quality’ strikes you as a strange word*: Plato here indicates that he has coined the abstract noun (*poiōtēs*). He made it from the interrogative *poios*, ‘of what quality?’, to which an answer such as ‘white’ or ‘hot’ is appropriate.
- 182b *similarly with the rest*: a résumé of the theory of perception (155d–157d), whose key theme—‘nothing is one thing just by itself’—was that a stone (for instance) is not white by itself but only for a given perceiver.
- 182b *not even the thing which acts*: see 157a4–7 with note.
- 182c *you say . . . change and flow, don’t you?*: an allusion to Heraclitus’ famous saying ‘everything flows’.

- 182c *if they're to be completely changing*: this reply by Theodorus shows that he has understood what exponents of total flux must reply.
- 182d *given that it's in flux?*: the reply accepts and generalizes Socrates' claim that a total flux theory is committed to 'flux of that very thing, whiteness' and hence that it's never 'possible to refer to any colour in such a way as to be speaking of it rightly', a devastating conclusion for the total flux thesis. 'Whiteness' here is probably one of the twins, the quality, engendered by the perceptual encounter of (say) stone and eye, and the claim is that this very quality must itself be altering, 'slipping away while one is speaking'. On an alternative reading, it is the Form or abstract quality whiteness.
- 182e *no more knowledge than not knowledge*: having turned from the quality generated to the seeing, Socrates now claims that on the total flux theory it too must be altering, that is (1) the seeing never stays constant in that guise, so (2) it is no more seeing than not seeing, and hence (3) 'it is no more knowledge than not knowledge'. But neither (2) nor (3) seems a safe deduction, even if we concede (1). A minor change in my visual experience hardly turns it into a smelling or tasting.
- 183a *every answer . . . is equally correct*: a new version of the difficulty. Earlier Socrates had said that no description would be correct. Either way he is stressing that no determinate description of how things are will be possible in the imagined conditions of total flux.
- 183b *might suit them best*: given the difficulties already sketched (see previous note) the flux theorists 'must establish some other language', though it is unclear what this might be like, or how we should understand the imagined concession of allowing them 'not even so'. The Greek text is uncertain here.
- 183c *at any rate not according to the line of argument that all things change*: the formulation is important. Socrates is not claiming to have refuted the equation of knowledge with perception, only saying that it cannot be supported by the 'all things change' thesis, which he has just refuted. Critics are divided here. Some hold that in refuting total flux Socrates has demolished the theory of perception (Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*); others that the theory of perception is regarded as true in its essentials, since only extreme flux (formulated at 181c) has been refuted (J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), 184). Another theory is that of Cornford, who held that Plato is here allowing that flux is true of the world of experience, and thereby pointing to the need for an unchanging world of Forms. But this cannot be what Socrates is arguing, given the absurd consequences he has just drawn (182c–e) from the extreme flux theory.
- 184a *when I was quite young and he was very old*: probably Plato is alluding to his dialogue *Parmenides*, an encounter between a very old Parmenides and a very young Socrates, whom Parmenides quizzes about Forms. There is no reason to believe there was a historical meeting between them.

Unlike other thinkers, Parmenides is always treated by Plato's characters with great respect, hence the designation 'venerable and awesome'.

- 184b *knowledge is perception, didn't you?:* 151e. In what follows Socrates will leave behind any association of Theaetetus' answer with the relativism of Protagoras or the Flux theory and instead scrutinize the equation of knowledge with perception directly, by drawing a key distinction between them.
- 184d *a mind or whatever one ought to call it:* 'mind' renders *psuchē*: see Glossary. Despite the hesitation, Socrates will continue to speak of the mind, now that he has drawn the important distinction between the senses as that *by means of which* we perceive, and the mind as that *with which we perceive* by means of some sense, or *with which we think* when the mind is active by itself. Note that Socrates no longer allows talk of the eye seeing or the tongue tasting; that would make a person something like a 'wooden horse' containing many independent warriors: independent sense-organs doing the seeing, hearing, and so on.
- 185a *you can't . . . perceive by means of hearing what you perceive by means of sight?:* the example is correct, since you can't see a sound or hear a colour (though you can, of course, both see and hear a waterfall, for example). But the general principle is false, since a shape can be both touched and seen. Still, for the argument Socrates is about to mount, he needs only the weaker claim that there are some qualities (such as colour or sound) that can be perceived by only one sense.
- 185a *that they both are?:* this, the first in a list of things we can grasp about (say) a colour and a sound, may be the thought that they exist, or just that they are both something (e.g. nearby or far away).
- 185b *like or unlike each other?:* exploring the terms such as 'are', 'one', 'different', 'same', 'like', 'unlike' (soon to be called 'common' notions) is characteristic of dialogues such as the *Parmenides* (see Introduction, p. xx) and the later *Sophist*.
- 185b *impossible . . . what they have in common . . . by means of sight:* first Socrates establishes that when we think, of a colour and a sound, that they *are*, or are *different*, or are *two*, or are *unlike*, we do so not by means of sight or hearing. He is leading up to an important point affirming the unity of consciousness by arguing that it is the mind that grasps anything in the cognitive sphere, either by means of the senses, or by means of itself (185e).
- 185c *by means of the tongue:* a hypothetical answer to a fanciful hypothetical question—What if we could explore whether the sound and colour are both salty?—preparing for the new insight that follows. The fanciful question asks if this would be investigated *with* sight or hearing. This appears to infringe the earlier requirement to use 'by means of', but perhaps the infringement is deliberate.
- 185e *the mind itself . . . apply in common to everything:* Theaetetus is quick to state the key points (a) no *instrument* or bodily part is involved when the mind



grasps these predicates and (*b*) they apply to everything. Plato's characters speak both of the mind grasping things (as here), or of a person grasping things with the mind (184d): the two locutions are evidently equivalent. Though the common notions may recall Forms, it is important that Socrates is here discussing how the mind grasps one or more of them *about* (say) a colour and/or a sound. His interest is in predicative judgements.

186b *calculating . . . past and present in relation to things in the future*: another sharp response by Theaetetus, who picks up the second of the pairs Socrates just mentioned, good and bad, when adding to the earlier list of being, like and unlike, and so on. Theaetetus recalls that a judgement about whether something is good or bad is made with reference to future benefit, as they agreed at 178c–179a.

186b *and what they both are*: other possible translations here: 'But their being, that is, what they both are' or 'But their being, that is, that they both are' (cf. 185a).

186c *by means of the body*: alternatively, 'all the experiences which reach the mind by means of the body'.

186c *by means of a great deal of troublesome education*: interpretation here is controversial. Some think the mind's ability to grasp being is simply its ability to judge that X is . . . , that is, its ability to form judgements of any kind. But the remark about a long and troublesome education suggests something more advanced. One result is clear: Socrates regards perception (e.g. perceiving the hardness of a hard thing) as a matter of merely having experiences available to newborns and animals, quite distinct from the more advanced 'calculations . . . with respect to being and usefulness' that are possible only when one is educated. This lays the ground for the radical distinction between perception and knowledge, which lies in the critical application of concepts such as being, sameness and difference, likeness and unlikeness. Socrates has *not* argued that the objects of knowledge are different from the objects of perception; indeed, when speaking of 'calculations about those things' he seems to mean, about the things we experience (such as a hard or soft surface).

186d *being and truth in the latter, but impossible in the former*: this stretch outlines an argument:

- (1) To know something one must attain its truth
  - (2) To attain truth one must attain being
  - (3) Perception cannot attain being
- So perception cannot be knowledge.

But what is it to 'attain being'? Plato may intend a *minimal* sense, whereby for a thing to be is for it to be something or other (cf. 152a–b). On the *minimal* reading, even grasping that a stone is hard would be grasping being, and hence truth, about a stone, and the point would be that (*a*) perception can't

even do this and (b) a grasp of something true is required for knowledge. This interpretation is defended by Burnyeat (*The Theaetetus of Plato*, 59). One surprising upshot of this reading is that it makes it impossible to speak of perceiving that something is such and such; as Burnyeat remarks, it leaves Plato defending an impoverished view of perception. A *stronger* interpretation of being is suggested by the references to calculation and reasoning at 186b–c; being would thus be something closer to a thing's essence, as distinct from some transitory or superficial characteristic. Attaining being in this stronger sense is needed to attain truth, in the sense of true reality (a common meaning of the Greek *alētheia*, for instance at *Phaedo* 65b and *Republic* 511e).

- 186e *other than perception*: this conclusion is 'absolutely clear' now that perception has been relegated to the status of mere experience. Earlier, by contrast, they were content to speak of perceiving that the wind is cold and such like, and to discuss judgements and perceptions as if they were interchangeable. Note that to refute the equation of knowledge with perception Socrates does not take the easy route of pointing out that (say) mathematical truths can be known but not perceived. Rather, he stays in the realm of sensible objects.
- 187a *judging, Socrates*: to judge is to think or believe something, so in seeking knowledge in judging they are inquiring into it as a kind of thinking or believing. The translation 'judge' is controversial; others prefer 'believe'. But 'judge' is used to capture the claim Socrates will make at 189e that judging is a kind of silent speaking, that is, an act, not (as believing) a state. And it fits (better than the translation 'believe') the idea here that judging is an activity of the mind.
- 187c *knowledge as the true kind of judgement?*: that knowledge is free from falsehood, that is, always correct, was already assumed at 152c. Examination of Theaetetus' new suggestion that knowledge is true judgement is postponed until 200e.
- 187d *a short while ago*: that is, in the discussion with Protagoras (167b), who denied false judgement, while Socrates' arguments (171–2) forced him to recognize it. Now it is Socrates who is about to raise and discuss at some length a number of difficulties casting doubt on the possibility of false judgement. But this shouldn't be taken to suggest that Socrates the character, or Plato the writer, actually doubts that false judgement is possible. Rather, the arguments are paradoxes, that is, plausible-sounding arguments that lead to evidently false conclusions. Some critics hold that the paradoxes are troubling only to anyone who identifies knowledge with true judgement, as Theaetetus (but not Socrates) does here. An alternative diagnosis is that Plato, while recognizing they are paradoxes, is not entirely clear on what false premiss or fallacious reasoning they rely. Indeed, there is a vast literature offering different diagnoses of the paradoxes: a tribute to their interest.

- 187e *this being naturally the case?*: see previous note. They start from the assumption that false judgement is possible; some ingenious arguments cast doubt on this everyday assumption.
- 188a *I'm leaving out learning and forgetting*: a hint that the alternatives 'either to know it or not to know it' are not the only ones. The wax tablet model (191c–196c) will explore the consequences of a richer picture which includes memory.
- 188a *has in his judgement*: see Glossary, s.v. 'judgement, to judge'.
- 188c *anywhere within these situations*: the first paradox, which Socrates will label 'by way of knowing and not knowing', is swiftly stated but raises many questions. It starts by assuming that when you make a judgement that X is Y, X and Y must be either known or unknown to you (188a–b). So there are four possible cases of judging that X is Y: (1) you know both X and Y; (2) you know neither X nor Y; (3) you know X but not Y; and (4) you know Y but not X. In each case Theaetetus agrees with Socrates that a false judgement that X is Y is impossible. Case (1) is impossible because it would mean that one who 'knows both sets of things . . . is ignorant of both sets of things'. Case (2) is ruled out with a helpful example: 'Is this possible: that someone who knows neither Theaetetus nor Socrates should get it into his thoughts that Socrates is Theaetetus . . . ?' This hints at an argument excluding case (2): if you know neither you couldn't even get them into your thoughts: 'that would be monstrous'. Cases (3) and (4) are presumably ruled out for analogous reasons.

How does the argument work? It seems to involve two key assumptions. (A1) If you know X you can't mistake it for anything else: this rules out false judgement in cases (1) and (3). The second operative assumption seems to be (A2): If you don't know X you can't make any judgement about it, true or false. While each assumption can seem plausible, together they rule out mistakenly believing that one thing is another, something we quite frequently do. While it is plausible that none could ever have the thought 'Socrates is Theaetetus', we can imagine someone holding the false belief 'Jack Smith is John Smith'. Or again, I can confuse two people I know if I see one of them at a distance and mistake him for another, as Socrates will later note (193b–c).

A further problem arises from the claim that the argument rules out *all* false judgement, with the claim that 'outside these situations it's surely impossible to make judgements'. But plenty of judgements (including false ones) take a different form from judging that X is Y, for instance, if I judge that Napoleon was tall, or that primroses are purple. These are not cases of judging that one thing is another, that is, not false identity judgements, but false predicative ones. So at best the argument rules out only one kind of false judgement: misidentifying one thing as another. Nonetheless, this first puzzle and its assumptions will govern most of the remainder of the discussion, and prove the final stumbling block (199d).

- 188d *being and not being?*: the second puzzle was a well-known paradox, and versions of it are found in earlier writings of Plato (*Cratylus* 429d; *Republic* 478).
- 188d *the things which are not . . . making a false judgement*: Socrates exploits a familiar but puzzling way of describing false belief as believing or judging ‘things which are not’; cf. 167a. The alternatives ‘either about one of the things which are or just by itself’ may be explained as follows. If I judge that Theaetetus is middle-aged, then I judge what is not ‘about’ him. Alternatively, any false judging could be described as judging that which is not ‘just by itself’. It is this second way of speaking that will be made to seem problematic in what follows.
- 189a *touches something . . . and a thing which is, since it’s one?*: here Socrates has embarked on the ‘scandalous analogy’ (Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, 78) between judging and verbs of perceiving. Where  $\phi$ ing is seeing, hearing, or touching, if you  $\phi$ , you must  $\phi$  something that is. (Objection: if you’re hallucinating, surely you’re not seeing anything? Reply: hallucinating is not seeing.) So, by analogy, if you judge (or believe) something, it must be something that is, so you can’t have a false belief. The moral that Plato will draw explicitly in *Sophist* 263–4 is that neither judging nor saying are like touching or seeing. Rather, one judges or says, about something, that it is such and such. If Plato has already reached this solution in the *Theaetetus*, he does not draw attention to it.
- 189a *isn’t judging at all*: the line of reasoning in these exchanges is evidently fallacious, going from ‘He  $\phi$ s what is not’ to ‘He  $\phi$ s nothing’ to ‘He isn’t  $\phi$ ing at all’.
- 189b *So it’s impossible to have in one’s judgement that which is not, either about the things which are or just by itself*: the reader correctly senses a fallacy here. Maybe you can’t see what is not there to be seen, but judging is different, and there is a perfectly good sense in which you can judge what is not the case. Indeed, you can do so both about something (as when you judge about Theaetetus that he’s middle-aged) or ‘just by itself’. But there is a germ of a philosophical difficulty here, as noted by Wittgenstein in his *Blue Book* (L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (New York, 1958), 31), ‘How can I think what is not the case? If I think that King’s College is on fire when it is not on fire, the fact of its being on fire does not exist. How then can I think it?’ See also the previous two notes.
- 189b *false judgement in us*: the first argument directly challenged the possibility of false judgement. This second one has a less serious consequence, in that it casts doubt on the familiar way of describing false judgement as ‘judging’ (or ‘having in one’s judgement’) ‘the things which are not’. Plato will finally put this puzzle to rest in *Sophist* 260–4; see note on 189a.
- 189c *other-judging . . . he can properly be said to be making a false judgement*: Plato has coined the term ‘other-judging’. Socrates presents what follows as

a way round the previous puzzle about judging what is not. However, what starts as a promising way to describe false judgement will be cleverly developed so as to be just as paradoxical as what has gone before. The text is uncertain at the point translated ‘affirms that one of the things which are is another’.

- 189c *in his judgement ugly instead of beautiful . . . a truly false judgement*: presumably Theaetetus has in mind a case such as the following. Perhaps because of bad light conditions, I judge a painting to be ugly when in fact it is beautiful (or conversely). We may also think of 185e, where Socrates congratulates Theaetetus (and corrects Theodorus), saying, ‘you’re handsome, not ugly, as Theodorus was saying’. Socrates will make fun of the expression ‘truly false’.
- 189d *to put something . . . not the thing it is?*: to continue with the example (previous note), X puts the painting in his thoughts as ugly, something other than it is.
- 189e *or in succession*: still with the example above, the person’s thought would need to be thinking about both the painting and ugly. But since, *ex hypothesi*, the painting is beautiful, Socrates seems to say that the person’s thought would need to think both beautiful and ugly. This is the germ of the paradox to follow. However, no thought of beautiful is present in such a case, even though the thing thought about is in fact beautiful. Theaetetus’ reply ‘in succession’ may pick up the point that a judgement such as ‘That painting is ugly’ takes time.
- 190a *‘judgement’ is speech; but speech spoken . . . silently to oneself*: the conception of thinking as holding a silent dialogue with oneself is of great interest, and becomes a familiar theme in Plato: see *Sophist* 263e–4; *Philebus* 38c–e. Given this description of thinking as an act ending in a *doxa*, the translation ‘judgement’ is more appropriate than ‘belief’, though often either term would do.
- 190c *ox is necessarily horse, or two one?*: an alternative translation is ‘an ox is . . . a horse’. With the help of the account of thought as silent speech, Socrates has cleverly turned a plausible thought into an impossible one. Suppose Tom mistakes the animal over there, which is in fact an ox, for a horse. Then we may say (1) Tom thinks that the ox is a horse. But this becomes (2) Tom says to himself ‘The ox is a horse’. Since (2) is impossible, this casts doubt (wrongly) on (1). In the same way (3) thinking that a picture, which is in fact beautiful, is ugly becomes the ridiculous (4) saying to oneself ‘What’s beautiful is ugly’, when in fact the silent speech should be ‘That picture is ugly’. The paradox is cleverly constructed, and Plato is clearly aware he has turned a promising account of false belief into something apparently contradictory. Whether he has the resources to pinpoint the fallacy is another question. At *Sophist* 263 Plato gives his speaker a successful account of false statement that uses many of the ingredients of the ‘other-judging’ account but without the paradoxical

twist. And it reappears in the partly successful wax tablet model of belief that follows (193d).

- 190c *let the expression pass*: the paradoxical ‘what’s different is different’ seems to say ‘What’s *F* is *F*’, which is true, and not impossible. In fact it is idiomatic Greek for ‘The one is the other’. By ‘this time’ Socrates alludes to the earlier moment when he picked up ‘Theaetetus’ form of words (189c–d).
- 190e *both things . . . or only one of them*: Socrates’ argument here mirrors that in the first paradox, 188a–c. There he argued that you can’t judge wrongly that *X* is *Y* when you *know* both, or only one, or neither. Here he follows a similar line but argues in terms of *what you are judging* (that is, thinking of) or, to use Theaetetus’ words at 190d10, what you ‘have a grasp of’. The way to avoid the paradox is to allow that one must think of both the painting and ugly when you judge that what is in fact a beautiful painting is ugly, but you needn’t think of beautiful when making the judgement.
- 190e *different-judging*: another word Plato has coined, equivalent to ‘other-judging’.
- 191a *way out for our inquiry*: earlier Socrates referred to the ‘difficulties’ (*aporiai*) they were in. Now he suggests a *poros*, ‘a way out’, of the impasse.
- 191a *when we agreed . . . are things one doesn’t know*: see 188c.
- 191b *in a case of that kind*: Theaetetus’ everyday example, mistaking a stranger spotted in the distance for your acquaintance Socrates, anticipates the account Socrates will give. Even though the stranger is unknown to you, he can figure in your thought because you’ve seen him.
- 191d *wax of a proper consistency*: the famous image of the mind as something receiving impressions is repeated in many later philosophical writings, including Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, II. x. 4–5. While strictly Plato writes of a block of wax, it is customary to refer to it as a wax tablet of the kind pupils used when learning to write.
- 191e *we were wrong*: contrary to the earlier agreements (188b–c) Socrates uses the model of the mind as a wax tablet to explain how you can (*a*) mistake one thing you know for another thing you know, and (*b*) mistake a thing you know for a thing you don’t know (provided you perceive it). Each case will involve mismatching something perceived with something known, that is, remembered, via an ‘imprint on the wax’. Before doing so lucidly, he will tease Theaetetus with an abstract and barely intelligible account of a multitude of cases.
- 192c *I don’t follow*: Plato expects the reader to be as puzzled as Theaetetus after the tour de force of combinations Socrates has just reeled off. Using ‘knows *X*’ to mean ‘have a memory imprint of *X*’, Socrates has gone through some fourteen situations in which a person either knows or doesn’t know *X* or *Y*, and either perceives or doesn’t perceive *X* or *Y*, and has listed (most of) the cases where falsely believing that *X* is *Y* is

impossible. He will later use examples to explain the first three cases he ruled out in this list (193a–b). Part way through, Socrates introduces the notion of an imprint ‘matched to a perception’. This is a key concept in the account of those cases where false judgement is possible.

- 192d *remember you and know you in myself, don't I?*: Socrates reminds Theaetetus that in the present discussion to know X is to have an imprint of X in one's mental wax tablet (see 191d).
- 193a *the first of those cases I was describing*: back at 192a.
- 193d *different-judging and the making of false judgements occur*: elaborating on the idea of the mind as a wax tablet capable of receiving imprints, Socrates outlines the first of three cases where false judgement is possible, namely, when I see two people I know—that is, have a memory imprint of—but mistake one for the other by misassigning the perceptions. The key notion of a mismatch is emphasized by two lively similes, putting one's shoe on the wrong foot, and mistaking left for right in a mirror. Note how, despite having rejected the ‘other-judging’ picture earlier (190b–e), Socrates revives the term to describe the kind of false judgement just sketched.
- 194b *obliquely and crosswise*: Socrates' admirable summing-up explains both true and false judgements. True ones occur when I fit a perception correctly to an imprint, false when a mismatch occurs. In one limited area, then, namely, where the person judges that something she now perceives is something she knows, Socrates has succeeded in giving an analysis of how we can make false judgements.
- 194c *tablet of the heart, as Homer calls it*: Plato puns on the Homeric term for heart (*kear*), resembling the word for wax (*kēr*).
- 195a *and they're called stupid*: Socrates adds colourful detail giving a series of supposed psychological explanations of the mistakes his formal account had left room for. The metaphors of dirty wax, hard wax, and so on are suggestive. It is curious that mistakes are here attributed only to defects in ‘the wax’, that is, the mind or memory alone (cf. ‘a tiny little mind’). We might expect some mistakes to be due to poor perceptual conditions; indeed Socrates' own example (193c) spoke of mistakes due to seeing people ‘some way off and not properly’.
- 195d *something admirable*: Plato often uses the device of an imaginary nameless objector to introduce a problem for the theory just developed (cf. 200a–b). The objector's phrase ‘in the connecting of a perception with a thought’ sums up neatly the foregoing account, and hints at the gap in the account that he will point out: what about mistakes not involving perception?
- 195e *one only has in one's thoughts?*: Socrates starts with mistakes no one can make, such as thinking that man is horse (not to be confused with mistaking a man (seen in the distance) for a horse, which is indeed possible). Likewise, it is impossible to think eleven is twelve. However, the argument will go on

- to confuse matters by equating the possible mistaken belief that  $7 + 5$  is 11, with the (impossible) belief that 12 is 11.
- 196b *Apparently*: Theaetetus' reply indicates some discomfort with this suspect move. While it is right to object that some mistakes not involving perception are possible, such as the belief that  $7 + 5$  is 11, the inference that this amounts to believing that 12 is 11 is surely incorrect.
- 196c *both to know and not to know the same things at the same time*: while this sounds like a contradiction, the recent example of holding that  $7 + 5$  is 11 might suggest a way it is possible. If I know 12 as 12, but not as the sum of 7 and 5, then I could be said to know it and not know it at the same time.
- 196c *something other than the transposing of thought in relation to perception*: note the strong conclusion. We might have expected Socrates to conclude that the wax tablet model explains *some* false judgements but leaves others—those not involving perception—unexplained, so it cannot give a *full* account of false judgement. It introduced the promising idea of different ways of thinking of the same thing (via perception, and via memory or thought). This move could be extended to make room for the mistaken belief that  $7 + 5$  is 11, but only by leaving behind the idea that the different ways of thinking of the same things must be perception and memory.
- 196c *impossible choice . . . Socrates*: because both alternatives are objectionable. But, as remarked two notes above, it need not be a contradiction to hold that one can both know (as 12) and not know (as the sum of 7 and 5) the same thing. If that thesis can be accepted, there is still room for false judgement. Though Socrates does go on to draw a distinction within knowing something (197–8), it does not prove adequate to resolve the difficulty.
- 196d *when we don't know knowledge?*: that is, when we don't know what knowledge is. For the equivalence between knowing X and knowing what X is, see 147b and Introduction, p. x.
- 197a *a logic-chopper*: cf. 165–6. Plato often satirizes such approaches to debate, as found in the dialogue *Euthydemus*.
- 197b *possession of knowledge*: the distinction Socrates draws here, between occurrent and dispositional uses of 'to know', is an important one, taken forward by Aristotle.
- 197b *doesn't have it but does possess it*: Socrates invokes the use of 'have' meaning 'wear' or 'have to hand'.
- 197d *a sort of aviary for birds of every kind*: another famous simile, comparing the mind to an aviary, that is, a bird-cage. It is designed to allow for a distinction between knowledge merely possessed (represented by a bird flying loose in my aviary) and knowledge which is to hand, that is, occurrent or actualized knowledge (represented by a bird I have retrieved from the aviary). Note the implication that, just as caged birds can be caught at



will, so we can easily bring to mind knowledge we possess; compare the reference in Socrates' earlier remark to the power to catch the caged birds.

197d *flocks . . . groups . . . anywhere among them all*: Socrates here hints at distinctions among types of dispositional knowledge, or perhaps types of concept. The ones 'flying about just anywhere' may be the *common* notions of 185; the 'flocks' and 'groups' may be genera (such as *animal*) and species. No explanation is given.

197e *receptacle is empty . . . pieces of knowledge*: that the mind is empty at birth is a surprising claim given the well-known Platonic theory of recollection (*Meno* 80–6; *Phaedo* 73–7), the thesis that learning is really recollecting knowledge the mind (or soul) had before birth. It may signal that Plato has abandoned that theory, or just that for the purposes of the image—explaining false belief via the aviary simile—the cage has to be empty before being stocked. Or it is one more deliberate flaw in a theory that will not in the end prove fruitful (cf. 'ridiculous aviaries', 200c)? 'Pieces of knowledge' translates the plural of the word for 'knowledge', *epistēmai*.

198b *we call it knowing*: here Socrates confines the term 'knowing' to the 'possession of knowledge'. The reader may be suspicious of the idea that we acquire knowledge of the numbers through teaching and learning, though that is a more plausible account of the later example of knowledge of how to read and write (198e). 'Has subject to oneself' continues the idea that to possess knowledge is to have a power; Aristotle later called it a potentiality.

198c *hear puzzles on those lines*: perhaps a reference to *Meno* 80: 'there is no inquiring into what you know; since you already know it there is no need to inquire'. With 'investigating how large some number is' Socrates has two cases in mind: (a) attempting a calculation, and (b) counting how many objects are in front of you. Suppose the answer is seventeen in each case; the inquirer, who is assumed to know the number seventeen, seems to be looking for what he already knows.

199b *dove instead of a pigeon*: here Socrates suggests that, if we distinguish possessing knowledge from having it, we can explain the false belief that  $7 + 5$  is 11 without disobeying the prohibition on saying that someone doesn't know what they know. But he will go on to reject the suggestion. While it is indeed possible not to have to hand knowledge one possesses, this is not a helpful way to explain the mistaken belief that  $7 + 5$  is 11. The very phrase 'It's then that one thinks eleven is twelve' should put us on our guard, and it is misleading to say that I get the wrong piece of knowledge when I make such a mistake.

199d *if even knowledge can sometimes make one ignorant*: labelling the numbers 'pieces of knowledge' is the source of the problem here.

199e *piece of unknowing . . . piece of knowledge*: this ingenious suggestion will soon be rejected by Socrates. Perhaps Theaetetus has an inkling of the

problem mentioned in the previous note, but the label ‘piece of unknowing’ does not prove any more helpful.

- 200b *is something he knows?:* the ‘expert in refutation’ (cf. 195c) recalls the exact words of the first paradox (188a–c) to show how the new suggestion (adding pieces of unknowing) falls foul of it. Though the aviary has introduced an important distinction (between occurrent and dispositional ways of knowing) and has allowed for thoughts about unperceived objects, it can’t make room for any false judgements precisely because it falls foul of that first problem.
- 200d *until one has acquired an adequate grasp of what, exactly, knowledge is:* an appropriate conclusion, given that most of the difficulties about false judgement have turned, directly or indirectly, on the question how you can be wrong about something you know, or, for that matter, something you don’t know. The question these paradoxes raise—what sort of knowledge (or grasp, 190d) of a thing you need if you are to have a belief about it—is a very interesting one, and is still a matter of keen debate (G. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford, 1982); J. Hawthorne and D. Manley, *The Reference Book* (Oxford, 2012)).
- 200e *admirable and good:* Theaetetus repeats the proposal he made at 187b, that knowledge is true judgement, and offers a pair of arguments: (1) true judgement is ‘free of mistakes’ (cf. 152c, where it was agreed that being ‘free from falsehood’ is a mark of knowledge); (2) all its results are ‘admirable and good’. For both points, and especially (2), see Plato’s *Meno* 97b: ‘True judgement is no worse a guide to correctness in action than wisdom (that is, knowledge)’ and ‘no less beneficial’. In the *Meno* Socrates counters that true judgement is *less* beneficial, since it can ‘run away’ from a person while knowledge is stable. This is because knowledge is not mere true judgement, but is ‘tied down by a working out of the explanation’. Plato will expect a reader of the *Meno* to foresee a similar rejection of the thesis that all true judgement is knowledge.
- 201b *making someone judge something?:* the point would be captured better by ‘making someone believe something’, where believing falls short of knowing.
- 201c *two are different:* the counter-example to ‘knowledge is true judgement’ is at once convincing and problematic. Convincing, since the juryman’s true judgement about a robbery was arrived at partly by good luck and through an inappropriate method; as such it does not qualify as knowledge, so the definition fails. But it is problematic in so far as Socrates suggests rival reasons why the juryman lacks knowledge: (1) he wasn’t an eyewitness (see ‘which it’s possible to know only if one has seen them’); (2) the courtroom setting, with ‘speech-makers and litigants’ allowed only a short time, means that jury members are ‘persuaded’ rather than taught the truth about what happened. The contrast that (2) invokes, between orators’ persuasion (ironically called an art) and true teaching,

is a familiar Platonic theme (cf. 172–4), but it is irrelevant here if even the best teacher, with plenty of time, couldn't impart knowledge to a non-eyewitness. Another question the counter-example raises is whether Plato actually accepts that there can be knowledge of contingent empirical matters such as what happened at a robbery.

It is worth noting the counter-example used at *Meno* 97: someone who has been told the way to Larissa may have a true judgement of it but lack knowledge, since only someone who has travelled the route can know it. In each case the counter-example provides a convincing case of a true judgement that doesn't amount to knowledge, but in both cases it leaves other questions unanswered. The special problem arising in the *Meno* is that the subsequent definition of knowledge as a true judgement 'tied down by working out the explanation' (*Meno* 98a) doesn't fit well its example of knowledge of a route acquired by travelling it.

201d *are knowable*: as well as recalling a claim that (1) true judgement with an account is knowledge, Theaetetus adds a second claim (2) that things of which there's no account are not knowable, whereas things that have an account are knowable. On (1), a valuable revision of the rejected second definition, see Introduction, p. xiv. 'Account' translates *logos*, which (like 'account') can mean any of the following: statement, speech, explanation, definition, reckoning. The idea that if you know something you must be able to give an account of it is familiar from other Platonic works, such as *Phaedo* 76b, *Symposium* 202a, and *Republic* 534b–c, and is an ancestor of the view that to know something you must be justified in believing it.

(2) is a rather different claim from (1), in so far as it focuses on things that have (or lack) an account and so are (or are not) knowable. This contrasts with (1), which seems to require that the *person* who knows, as well as having a true judgement, must be able to give an account, as 202c confirms. The bulk of the Dream theory that follows (201b9–202b9) elaborates on (2); only the Coda from 202b9 returns to (1).

Theaetetus' words 'not knowable, he said—he actually called them that' seem to underline the historical origin of the theory and its use of an unfamiliar word for knowable: *epistêton*.

201d *my dream in return for yours*: hence the label 'Socrates' Dream' for the theory he's about to sketch. The phrase is apparently 'an allusion to the familiar activity of swapping dreams soon after waking up' (Sedley, *Midwife of Platonism*, 154). Plato probably chose the device of a dream to overcome an anachronism: the theory was expounded after Socrates' death. Speculation about its author is inconclusive, but the best guess is Antisthenes, whom Aristotle reports as holding that 'a thing can only be spoken of by its own account'. On a contrary view the theory is Plato's own invention, albeit one he will reject (*ibid.* 158). But Theaetetus' remark (see previous note) tells against this.

- 202b *a weaving together of names is the being of an account*: language similar to this is found in the *Sophist*'s distinction between a *logos* in the sense of 'statement', and the names and verbs that make up a statement. But, despite the verbal echo, the point here is different: it is that a *logos* in the sense of 'definition' is a weaving together of the names of the constituent elements. Compare the definition 'clay is earth mixed with water' offered at 147c above.
- 202b *and judgeable in a true judgement*: this note reviews the body of the Dream theory, which introduces *elements* and later *complexes*, contrasting them in ways conveniently tabulated.

Elements	Complexes
(1) for example, what we are composed of	for example, us
(2) have no account	have an account, formed by weaving together the names of its elements
(3) can be named only	expressible in an account
(4) you can't add 'being' or 'this' to an element if saying it on its own	
(5) unknowable	knowable
(6) perceptible	
(7)	judgeable in a true judgement

The theory first divides elements from complexes, then declares that to know a complex is to be able to give a *logos* of its (unknowable) elements, so that knowledge of something requires an ability to analyse it into its elements, though these are unknowable; see (2) and (5) above. This is the aspect Socrates will focus on and attack, using letters and syllables as his examples of elements and complexes. But the only other clue he gives about elements is that 'we' are composed of them (1). What are our elements? Bodily parts (head, arms, liver, etc.) or atoms (but these are not *perceptible*: see (6)). If logical rather than material analysis is envisaged, perhaps parts are 'rational' and 'animal', as conceptual parts of 'man'. Sedley (*Midwife of Platonism*, 157–63) uses (1) and (6) to argue that the theory is that of the Presocratic thinkers such as Empedocles who gave a reductive ('bottom-up') account of the material world. Against this is the theory's emphasis on making knowledge rest on unknowable elements, which suggests a more sophisticated epistemological theory. In contrast to Presocratic theories about what the world was made of, this Dream theory has an epistemological agenda: it attempts to block a threatened regress of knowledge as analysis, by making it end in unanalysable, hence unknowable, elements.

Point (4) is especially puzzling. Does it claim that (a) you can't say anything about an element? If so, it is self-refuting, since the theory says plenty about elements. That may not be a problem, since Socrates will indeed find it objectionable, but on other grounds. A more plausible reading is

(b) you can't add any of the forbidden items ('is', 'this', and so on) if you want to speak of element X *on its own*. The remark 'if the thing itself . . . had an account proper to itself' suggests this, and uses a phrase Aristotle ascribes to Antisthenes, who may be the author of the theory; see second note on 201d above.

(6) That elements, while unknowable, are perceptible may suggest that they are material parts. Or perhaps it is the way the theory indicates that we have some grasp of elements (since they form the building blocks of knowledge) even though that grasp falls short of knowledge; hence they're perceptible.

(7) Complexes, as well as being knowable, are 'judgeable in a true judgement'. This remark encouraged Ryle to discern a logical theory distinguishing items that can be named from items (propositions) that can be said or thought or known (with *savoir* knowledge); he compared *Sophist* 262d with its distinction between naming and saying. Whatever the remark's import, it is notable that the theory does *not* say that we can have judgement of elements, though Dorothea Frede ('The Soul's Silent Dialogue: A Non-Aporetic Reading of the *Theaetetus*', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 215 (1989), 20–49) argues that it must have allowed this.

202c *perfect condition in respect of knowledge*: here, in the coda to the theory, Socrates makes the connection with *Theaetetus*' third definition of knowledge as true judgement together with an account.

For a case of having a true judgement of something without knowledge, we might think of someone who is aware that clay is what potters use but who does not know what it really is, namely, earth mixed with water. At 202d Socrates seems to endorse the new definition, but after refuting the Dream theory (206c) he will proceed to refute all three suggestions about an account that added to true judgement yields knowledge.

202e *most subtle point . . . the elements are unknowable but the class of complexes is knowable*: Socrates will reject this asymmetry of knowability. For a suggestion about why the theory maintains it, see note on 202b.

202e *Elements and complexes of letters*: the Greek word pair *stoicheion*–*syllabē* serves for both the general notion of element–complex, and the specific case of letter–syllable; Plato adds 'of letters' (*grammata*) to indicate when he means the second pair. The term covers both written characters and the spoken sounds they represent.

203b *seven vowels . . . have only voice, but no account whatever*: asked for an account of S and O *Theaetetus* replies that letters don't have letters (i.e. elements) of their own, but he goes on to say well-informed things about consonants of two classes (noised and noiseless), and vowels (seven because Greek has long and short e, as well as long and short o). The reader may be meant to take these insightful remarks about letters, or rather phonemes, to hint that other kinds of account are available apart

from an enumeration of elements: see G. Fine, ‘Knowledge and *Logos* in the *Theaetetus*’, *Philosophical Review*, 88 (1979), 366–97, and Introduction, pp. xxiv–v.

- 203c *a syllable is both its letters . . . put together?*: Socrates begins a dilemma argument aiming to show that both alternatives rule out the asymmetry of knowability. The first horn, A, a syllable is all its letters, is swiftly refuted. The second horn, B (a syllable is ‘some one kind of thing’), beginning at 203e, has a more complex refutation.
- 203d *knows the two of them without knowing either?*: this seemingly conclusive refutation of A may be questioned if we consider a parallel case. A television picture is just its several thousand pixels, but I can see the whole picture without seeing each pixel. Hence I can perhaps know the whole complex, and thus know all its parts taken together, without knowing each part singly. However, Socrates would reject this suggestion for the case of knowing—the suggestion that you can know the whole (that is, all the parts) without knowing each part singly—if he is wedded to the idea that ‘Knowledge is based on knowledge’ (Fine, ‘Knowledge and *Logos* in the *Theaetetus*). Another problem with the idea that a syllable just is all its letters is that this overlooks the order of the letters. SO is a different syllable from OS. Perhaps Plato intends the reader to spot this.
- 203e *something which has one form of its own, and is different from the letters*: horn B of the dilemma will be rejected at 205c–d with the claim that, as such, the syllable is partless and hence as unknowable as a letter. But first Socrates introduces complications, with an excursus into whether a whole and a sum are the same.
- 204b *say they’re different*: Theaetetus’ risky suggestion that whole is not the same as sum will be rejected in the next stretch, on the grounds that each of them is ‘that from which nothing whatever is missing’ (204d).
- 205a *no difference between a sum and a whole*: for the reason given in the previous note.
- 205b *trying to say just now*: at 203e. Now that they have settled the status of a whole, they return to the suggestion of the dilemma’s horn B (see note on 203e), that the complex (or syllable) doesn’t have parts.
- 205c *itself, by itself, is, as we said, incomposite*: Socrates refers back to the exposition of the Dream theory at 202e, but the expression ‘incomposite’ was not used there. McDowell (*Plato: Theaetetus*, 246) speculates that it and the later description ‘single in form’ are intended to recall the use of these terms for Platonic Forms at *Phaedo* 78c–d, and thus to hint at a criticism of that aspect of the Forms.
- 205e *let’s not accept it*: Socrates restates the upshot of the dilemma argument (started at 203c) against the asymmetry of knowability of elements and complexes. What follows? Elements must be knowable if the complexes they compose are knowable, but must they also be expressible in an

account? If so, there must be a different kind of account than an enumeration of their elements, since elements have none. See note on 203b.

- 206b *the class of elements admits of knowledge that is far clearer, and more important . . . than the complex*: in this second argument, labelled empirical by Bostock (*Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1988), 219), Socrates claims that our learning experiences tell us that the elements of literacy and of music, far from being unknowable, admit of clearer knowledge than the complexes they compose. If we consider written characters then yes, we must learn them (and what sounds they represent) before we can read a syllable. On the other hand, we *hear* whole syllables before we recognize individual phonemes. It is not surprising to find Socrates making this firm declaration in favour of the special status of knowledge of elements, given his rejection of the Dream theory's thesis that knowledge (of complexes) can be based on *unknowable* elements. In his later writings (notably the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*) Plato often uses the relations of letters and syllables to model knowledge.

What moral should the reader draw from this refutation of the Dream theory? There seem three possible ones: (1) since elements are knowable, there must be knowledge without a *logos*; (2) since elements are knowable, and since knowledge requires a *logos*, there must be some other kind of *logos* than the enumeration of elements; (3) an absolute division into elements and complexes is wrong. If (1) is intended, it is odd that the discussion proceeds by trying to identify the required kind of *logos* for knowledge. (2) is more probable; the third kind of *logos* to be discussed ('distinguishing mark') might seem more promising, though it will be rejected. (3) might seem an attractive option, but perhaps not to Plato, whose writings suggest that he did take a hierarchical view of the basic building blocks of reality, even if these are not material elements as suggested in the Dream theory.

- 206c *it means one of three things*: or perhaps 'he means one of three things': cf. 208c. The three to be discussed are (i) *logos* as statement, (ii) *logos* as enumeration of elements (much as in the Dream theory), and (iii) *logos* as distinguishing mark. (ii) and (iii) are alternative versions of *logos* as (roughly) definition, and the rest of the discussion focuses on knowing a thing, equated with knowing what a thing is, rather than knowing, for example, who stole what at a robbery (201b).
- 206e *apart from knowledge: logos as statement* (a common use of the term) is swiftly shown not to be that which, added to true judgement, yields knowledge, since any judgement can be expressed as a statement. 'Expressions and names' translates terms Plato later uses (*Sophist* 262) for verbs (*rhēmata*) and names (*onomata*), but probably no such precise classification is intended here.
- 207a *Hesiod . . . 'Wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke'*: the 'hundred . . . timbers' quotation is from *Works and Days* 456. This second suggestion (being able to give

an answer (to what a thing is) ‘in terms of its elements’) is initially more promising, though it could only apply to knowledge of complexes such as a wagon, not to knowledge of its elements. It is a puzzle why Socrates returns here to something close to the Dream theory, but we find that he has a new criticism up his sleeve (207e–208b).

- 207c *about a wagon’s being*: that is, about its essence or what it is. ‘Expertise and knowledge’ translates terms cognate with *technē* and *epistēmē*. See Glossary, s.v. ‘know’, ‘knowledge’.
- 208a *the first syllable of your names?*: this very ingenious counter-example to proposal (ii), *logos* as enumeration of elements, relies on an intuition that this kind of knowledge requires a reliable expertise which the imaginary speller has been shown to lack, since he got the first syllable of Theaetetus’ name right but the same first syllable wrong in spelling Theodorus’ name. In Greek letters he gave theta correctly in the first, tau incorrectly in the second case. Since theta is a plosive (as in ‘hothead’), the mistake would be easily made.
- 208b *oughtn’t yet to be called knowledge*: the reader will be as convinced as Theaetetus by the counter-example. But the point about knowledge it relied on—that knowledge, in the realm of literacy, requires a reliable expertise—is not further pursued.
- 208c *the man . . . with an account*: cf. 206c.
- 208c *differs from everything else*: said to be ‘What most people would say’, suggestion (iii) is illustrated by the example of the sun, and the distinguishing mark offered is an observational one. However, the reader is bound to think also of the more philosophical procedure (practised by Socrates in many dialogues) of defining something abstract by differentiating it from other things of a like kind. This procedure is formalized in dialogues such as the *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*, and is later called definition by *genus* and *differentia*. Recall 175c, where the philosopher of the ‘digression’ is said to investigate how justice and injustice differ from each other and from everything else. But here Socrates will continue to focus on recognition of particular things (the sun, Theaetetus) via observable features rather than knowledge of abstract concepts.
- 208e *picture with shading*: the Greek term *skiagraphēma* denotes a painting using a technique Plato often mentions: *skiagraphia*. It evidently produced striking effects using contrasts of light and shade, most effective when viewed from afar.
- 209b *more than anyone else?*: after playing along with the suggestion, Socrates now brings a very subtle objection to it, proposing that any judgement of Theaetetus (and not just a knowledgeable one) would be impossible if I lack a grasp of what distinguishes Theaetetus. For evaluation, see note on 209e.
- 209c *memory trace . . . make me judge correctly about you*: Socrates reinforces the objection (see previous note) in language recalling details of the wax



tablet model of the mind (191–5). With ‘if I meet you tomorrow’ compare the last words of the dialogue, pointing ahead to the sequel dialogue the *Sophist*, featuring a conversation between the same characters and a visitor from Elea.

209d *turns out to be quite absurd*: the objection started above is continued in the now familiar form of an argument by dilemma (cf. 170e–171c, 203c–205e). Whether the theory tells you to add a judgement of the distinguishing mark, or to add knowledge of one, it is flawed.

209e *telling us to add something we already have*: Socrates has argued that to have any true judgement of Theaetetus I must already grasp his distinguishing mark (209b). To use a different comparison, it would be like the instruction ‘Once the engine is running, turn on the ignition’, which would be absurd since the ignition must already be on for the engine to be running. The phrase ‘the turning of a treadmill’ is a free adaptation of the Greek, which means literally ‘the revolving of a writing scroll or a pestle’.

Is Socrates right to object that even to have a true judgement of X I must already grasp what distinguishes X from everyone else? Perhaps I just need to be able to distinguish X from everyone else I’m acquainted with (not from absolutely everyone else). Even that may be too strong a requirement: maybe I just need to have *some* way of indicating (to myself or others) who my judgement is about. The question, What is required for my judgement to be a judgement *about X*? is an extremely interesting and controversial one in the theory of thinking and of reference. See Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, and Hawthorne and Manley, *Reference Book*, for discussion.

210a *with knowledge . . . or of anything else*: now comes the second horn of the dilemma: suppose knowledge of X is true judgement of X together with *knowledge* of X’s distinguishing mark. First labelled ‘amusing’, it is now rejected as ‘silly’ given that the proposed definition contains the very term defined. The objection seems to be to the circularity of the definition. Someone could respond that it is not circular, since it defines knowledge of X in terms of knowledge of something else. But then the objection could be rephrased: now an infinite regress threatens. Socrates has already, in rejecting the Dream theory, rejected an account that makes knowledge terminate in some grasp of *unknowable* items.

Is the dilemma fatal? One response might be to deny that the knower needs any cognitive access (whether true judgement or knowledge) to the *logos* that turns true judgement (true belief) into knowledge. In modern epistemology this way out is labelled ‘externalism’: the extra condition required for knowledge need not be something the would-be knower either knows or believes, it just has to be true of the knower, e.g. that her belief was acquired in a reliable way. But this way out could not have appealed to Plato, since speakers in his dialogues regularly require that

one who knows *can give a logos* (and whatever may have been meant by *logos*, it is something the would-be knower has to have a grasp of). In modern terminology Plato was, on the evidence, an internalist about knowledge.

- 210c *which in fact you don't know*: Socrates frequently comments on this beneficial effect of his refutations (e.g. *Meno* 84b). But unlike many other dialogue partners, Theaetetus does not boast of any expertise—far from it (148b, e)—so it is a pleasantry to suggest this modest youth will become ‘less burdensome’ to others as a result of Socrates’ midwifery with its negative outcome (see 151c). Socrates’ next remark about ‘beautiful’ young men is a tribute to Theaetetus’ intellect; cf. 185e.
- 210d *King's Porch . . . in the morning*: Plato here indicates a dramatic date for the conversation: shortly before the trial of Socrates on a charge of impiety brought by Meletus. This places it dramatically just before the conversation portrayed in the *Euthyphro*, a discussion of piety and impiety set in the King's Porch, where charges of impiety were heard. The invitation to ‘meet here again . . . in the morning’ is matched by the opening of Plato's *Sophist*, fashioned as a conversation the next day between those present in the *Theaetetus* together with a visitor from Elea, who takes over the main role from Socrates. Plato clearly intended to mark the *Sophist* as a sequel to the *Theaetetus*, and there are many continuities in what is discussed, notably the problem of falsehood. However, stylometric tests indicate that the *Sophist* was written considerably later than the *Theaetetus*; and it has a quite different, and more dogmatic, approach, since the visitor from Elea argues confidently for weighty conclusions.

## TEXTUAL NOTES

149d3: *νέον ὄν* is intelligible if some suitable noun ('embryo' in the translation) is understood: see Campbell's note (see Select Bibliography).

152c2: reading *γ'ἄρ* for *γὰρ*, with Badham: cf. the divergence of the MSS at 171c10.

156d1–2: the 1995 Oxford Classical Text (OCT: see Note on the Text and Translation) marks a lacuna here. The translation posits no lacuna, and assumes omission of the second *οὕτω δὴ*.

179a1–3: reading *δὴ* (Campbell) for *μὴ* at 179a1, and retaining *αὐτῷ* at 179a3. This has the advantage, over the OCT, of giving some point to *καὶ* at 179a1.

180e1: the text is doubtful. I have retained the words printed in the OCT but taken *οἶον* as Plato's introduction to the quotation, not part of the quotation itself.

201b1–2: reading *ἀποστερούμενοι* (Par. 1808) at 201b1, and *βιάζόμενοι* (Diès) at 201b2.

205d1: reading *τὸ* for *τοῦ*, with Bonitz.

J.McD.

## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

**account** (Greek *logos*) *Logos* can mean any of the following: statement, theory, discourse, reason, definition, tally, reckoning. In the third attempt at a definition of knowledge, as true judgement with a *logos* (201c–end), the translation ‘account’ is used. It captures well the three kinds of *logos* proposed (roughly, statement, tally, and definition).

**act on, be acted on** (Greek *poiein, paschein*) These terms play a key role in the theory of perception, according to which something like a stone *acts on* a person’s eye (which thus *is acted on*), producing a seen quality (q.v.) such as whiteness ‘in the stone’ and a perceiving—a ‘seeing white’—in the eye. The verb *poiein* can also mean ‘to make’, and is used thus at 159e: ‘it makes the perceiver otherwise qualified and another thing’.

**being, to be** (Greek *ousia, einai*) Greek does not have one verb for ‘to exist’ and another for ‘to be something or other’, but a single verb. It is often used on its own, without a complement, as in ‘Man is the measure of all things, of those which *are*, that they *are* and of those which *are not*, that they *are not*’. This need not be understood as ‘of those which exist . . . and of those which do not exist . . .’. Rather it is used in a way that includes the reading ‘of those which are <say, cold> that they are <cold>’ and so on. ‘To be’ is usually ‘to be this, that, or the other’ (‘to be’ used predicatively), even where no explicit complement is present.

The verb is also used in contexts where ‘is the case’ or ‘is true’ would be an appropriate translation, as in the expression ‘to have in one’s judgement the things which are not’ (167a and elsewhere); understand as ‘to believe what is not true’.

‘Being’ translates *ousia*, the nominalization of the verb ‘to be’. In a few places we could safely gloss it as ‘existence’ (for instance, 155b), but more usually (like the verb) it represents being something or other. In places it is clearly the nominalization of ‘what something is’, for instance (207c) ‘the being of a wagon’ means ‘what a wagon is’ (or perhaps: the essence of a wagon); likewise (at 202b) ‘the being of an account’ means ‘what an account is’. In 185–6 the term ‘being’ is put to important use in the argument distinguishing perception from knowledge, and critics differ over how to understand it; see

notes ad loc. Some favour existence, some essence, and others take it simply as the nominalization of ‘X is . . .’, that is, to indicate something propositional in form. See, further, C. Kahn, ‘Some Philosophical Uses of “To Be” in Plato’, *Phronesis*, 26 (1981), 105–34, and L. Brown, ‘The Verb “To Be” in Greek Philosophy: Some Remarks’, in S. Everson (ed.), *Language* (Cambridge, 1994).

*Ousia* can also be used for (a person’s) substance, that is, wealth; it is met first in this use (144c–d).

**element, complex** (Greek *stoicheion*, *syllabē*) This pair of Greek terms is translated either as ‘element’ and ‘complex’, or as ‘letter’ and ‘syllable’ when the context makes clear that letters are the kinds of element under discussion. The term *syllabē* literally means ‘collection’ or ‘compound’, and it can be used for compounds of many kinds. Elements are thought of as partless, and as being the parts of the complexes they make up. The term *stoicheion* is also that used for Euclid’s elements, that is, elementary propositions. It is unclear how we are to understand the elements and complexes under discussion in Socrates’ Dream (201e–206b), perhaps because Plato has left it deliberately indeterminate.

**judgement, to judge** (Greek *doxa*, *doxazein*) The noun *doxa*, translated ‘judgement’, can also mean ‘belief’, ‘opinion’, and even ‘reputation’. Like ‘belief’ and ‘opinion’, *doxa* can be contrasted with knowledge, but, again like belief, *doxa* can be used in a way in which knowledge is a species of true *doxa*. The translation ‘judgement’ is used throughout to capture the claim at 189e that a *doxa* is an inner assertion. (By contrast, ‘belief’ suggests a state.) However, in many cases ‘belief’ would be an equally good, and more natural, translation.

Likewise the verb *doxazein*, translated either ‘judge’ or ‘have in one’s judgements’, could in many places be translated ‘believe’. This translation uses ‘he judges . . .’ when the verb takes a ‘that’ clause; and ‘he has . . . in his judgement’ where *doxazein* takes a direct object. Plato seems to have coined the use ‘X *doxazei* Theaetetus’ (209a–d) to mean something like ‘X has a judgement, belief about Theaetetus’ (or perhaps ‘. . . about who Theaetetus is’). Judging, *doxazein*, is said to be ‘what the mind is doing when it’s busying itself, by itself, about the things which are’ (187a).

**know** (Greek *eidenai*, *gignōskein*, *epistasthai*) Where English has the single verb, Greek has the three listed above. Though interesting distinctions can be drawn between them, Plato quite deliberately

uses them interchangeably in this work. The translator can safely use ‘know’ at all points, a fortunate position compared to that of the translator into French or German, who must generally choose between *savoir*, *wissen* for ‘know that . . .’ (propositional knowing) and *connaître*, *kennen* for knowing persons (e.g. 188b), places, and things. This highlights the difficulty a reader has at points in telling what kind of knowing is in play at any point. Unlike modern writers, Plato does not distinguish ‘know that . . .’ (propositional knowing) from ‘know’ taking a direct object—a person, place, or thing (concrete or abstract). Greek idiom partly accounts for this, since the Greek for ‘He knows what a wagon is’ is ‘He knows a wagon, what it is’—sometimes simply ‘He knows a wagon’. See 147b, where ‘one who doesn’t know knowledge’ means ‘one who doesn’t know what knowledge is’. Similarly, talk of knowing (or not knowing) a given syllable (207–8) must be understood as knowing what a given syllable is (that is, how to spell it). This case unites all three kinds of knowing that contemporary writers are at pains to distinguish: propositional knowledge, knowing how, and knowing things or persons. (Cf. M. Burnyeat, ‘Episteme’, in B. Morison and K. Ierodiakonou (eds.), *Episteme, etc.: Essays in Honour of Jonathan Barnes* (Oxford, 2011), for a critique of modern attempts to map this ‘epistemic troika’ onto Plato’s usage.)

Have knowledge, possess knowledge (*echein*, *kektēsthai epistēmēn*). Plato distinguishes between what today are called occurrent and dispositional uses of ‘to know’—that is, currently being aware of as distinct from the kind of knowing that can be attributed to someone who is asleep or thinking about something else (197–9). He does so by reserving ‘have knowledge’ for the occurrent use (drawing on a sense of *echein* (‘have’) in which it means ‘to wear’, that is, ‘have on <a garment>’) and employing ‘possess knowledge’ for the dispositional use.

**knowledge** (Greek *epistēmē*; occasionally *gnōsis*) ‘Knowledge’ almost always renders *epistēmē*; unlike the English noun it can be used in the plural to mean ‘kinds of knowledge’ (148d) or ‘pieces of knowledge’ (197–8). The term covers a wide range of kinds of knowledge, both knowledge that such and such is the case, knowledge of a person or place, and other kinds such as geometry or the art of making shoes (146d).

**mind** (Greek *psuchē*) The term is often translated ‘soul’. In this dialogue it is used always in connection with cognition, as that with which we

## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

do our thinking, knowing, remembering, and so on; hence the translation 'mind'. In other works Plato makes Socrates discuss the immortality of the *psuchē*: there 'soul' is more appropriate as a translation.

**other-judging** (Greek *allodoxia*) A term coined by Plato (189c) in an (unsuccessful) attempt to make room for false judgement. It is roughly: judging things to be other than they are. He sometimes uses a variant, 'different-judging' (*heterodoxia*).

**perception, perceive** (Greek *aisthēsis*, *aisthanesthai*) The verb can be used to mean 'notice', 'realize', 'become aware of', not necessarily involving any of the senses, as well as for perceiving by one of the senses. However, Plato focuses the discussion of *aisthēsis*, perception, narrowly on sense-perception. See, further, M. Frede, 'Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues', in M. Frede, *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 1987). 'Perception' is used both for the capacity, and for a given occurrence, as when the theory of perception states that, in seeing or hearing, twin offspring are generated, a quality (in the object) and a perception (in the sense-organ).

**quality** (Greek *poiōtēs*) Plato coined the word *poiōtēs* (182a) for that which (on the theory of perception) is produced in an object when a perceiver 'meets' the object; for example, an instance of whiteness or coldness. Cicero coined the Latin *qualitas* as a direct equivalent to Plato's invented term.

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